RICE UNIVERSITY

Narrative States:
Human Rights Discourse in Contemporary Literature

by

Jennifer Rickel

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Betty Joseph, Associate Professor, Chair
English

Susan Lurie, Associate Professor
English

Lora Wildenthal, Associate Professor
History

HOUSTON, TEXAS
MAY 2012

ABSTRACT

Narrative States:

Human Rights Discourse in Contemporary Literature

by

Jennifer Rickel

Human rights have become a dominant framework through which to narrate and read political violence in contemporary literature concerning Africa, the Caribbean, and the Indian subcontinent. This dissertation argues that human rights discourse depoliticizes crises that result from histories of colonialism, inequitable development policies, and the growth of transnational capital. The testimonial narrative structure of human rights treats political violence as trauma and portrays the narrator as testifier and reader as witness. It assumes that in the exchange between these figures a cathartic process takes place and that by proxy the original political violence may be resolved. The language of human rights is thus deployed to illuminate the suffering of others without interrupting processes of global capitalism or narratives of US exceptionalism. This dissertation examines the intersection of human rights discourse and postcoloniality. It analyzes the decolonial strategies through which postcolonial texts challenge human rights discourse and shift focus from trauma and catharsis to the national and international policies, business practices, and cultural narratives that sustain inequitable power structures.

This dissertation begins by critiquing the concept of literary humanitarianism, which suggests that the reader may fulfill a humanitarian act by reading a story of suffering. After showing in the introduction how this literary trend is connected to changes in the nation-state system, the first two chapters analyze the narrative mechanics of the testimonial narrative structure. As these opening essays examine depictions of apartheid in South Africa, genocide in Rwanda, and slow violence in India, they problematize the expansion of the 'universal' humanist narrative voice and critique the construction of a humanitarian reader. Chapter three then compares methodological approaches to storytelling to analyze the relationship between literature, the archive, and lived reality in post-apartheid South Africa. Moving into a discussion of the economic and cultural imperialism that characterize the postcolonial condition, the final two chapters reveal how representations of old and new diasporas across Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Americas resist the language of human rights. Together, these chapters argue that the political potential of literature is not in staging humanitarian resolutions but in interrogating the frameworks that sustain inequality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have completed this dissertation with the support of exceptional advisors, colleagues, friends, and family. My work has benefited tremendously from the guidance and intellectual energy of my dissertation committee. Betty Joseph continually challenged and inspired me with her remarkably insightful questions and thought-provoking analyses. Many of the ideas in this work about which I am most excited formed through her guidance. Susan Lurie taught me to write with greater precision, and her enthusiasm about my research encouraged me to grow in my confidence as an intellectual. Lora Wildenthal was a careful and generous reader, and she delivered incisive commentary with unparalleled kindness. I offer my sincere thanks to this committee for providing me with models of intellectual sophistication, professionalism, and good humor. I am thankful also to Rita Raley, my earliest professional mentor, who introduced me to several of the literary works that I analyze in this project and first enabled me to see myself as a scholar.

The Rice University English Department and Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality provided generous support toward the completion of this dissertation. I am grateful to the Dean of Humanities for awarding me two Sarofim Teaching Fellowships for the 2011–2012 academic year that not only allotted funding but also allowed me to bring my research on literature and human rights into the classroom. Thank you also to my fellow participants in the 2008–2009 Andrew W. Mellon Graduate Research Seminar "America and the World" and to my cohort in the Humanities Research Center's 2011–2012 interdisciplinary writing workshop for their collaboration.

The good company and wisdom of several colleagues and friends have been vital to this endeavor and my well-being. Samhita Sunya worked alongside me nearly every day offering a critical ear and an enduring friendship (*this dissertation and I would be incomplete without her, and for this she gets an asterisk denoting her brilliance as a scholar and friend). I have found a kindred spirit in AnaMaria Seglie, whose balance of rigorous scholarship and good-natured kindness continues to motivate me. I am thankful to Kattie Basnett for her profound thoughtfulness and invaluable insight not only in reading my work but also in our friendship. Heba Khan has encouraged me greatly through her understanding and laughter. Thank you also to Magda Marks for being a precious lifeline to the world outside of academia and my longtime, forever friend.

I have also been so fortunate to have family who let me be and helped me through. In my childhood my mom Carolyn Cary made going to the library a regularly scheduled and especially fun event. She taught me to enjoy learning and showed me that my education was worth fighting for. Thank you Mom for your tenacious belief in me. Thank you to my brother Steven Cary for being an ally through the good and bad of our shared inheritance, and because it means so much that you are as proud of me as I am of you. My husband Drew Rickel provided sanctuary and patiently walked through every single step of this process with me. His endless encouragement sustained me, and his generous heart and extraordinary wit continues to inspire me. Thank you Drew for reminding me of my strength, for energizing me with the absurdity and wisdom of your humor, and for building a life with me that I am happy to live.

CONTENTS

Abstract		iii
Acknowledgments		v
Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace*	17
Chapter 2	Witnessing Political Violence: Literary Testimony and the Crisis of the Humanitarian Reader	43
Chapter 3	Literature and the Archive: Narrating Uncertainty in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*	89
Chapter 4	Narrating Transnational Identity and Remapping the Postcolonial in Three Caribbean Texts	124
Chapter 5	Refugee Stories: Contemporary Imperialism and the New Diaspora	166
Conclusion		199
Notes		202
Works Cited		213

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to Dave Eggers's *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*, the Sudanese refugee on whose life the novel is based addresses the reader:

> I am blessed to have lived to inform you that even when my hours were darkest, I believed that some day I could share my experiences with others. This book is a form of struggle, and it keeps my spirit alive to struggle. To struggle is to strengthen my faith, my hope and my belief in humanity. Since you and I exist, together we can make a difference! (xv).

This preface engages the reader as a humanitarian; it suggests Achak is blessed by way of the reader and his purpose for living is defined via the reader's engagement with this text. It frames the novel according to an understanding of justice in which a person who has been wronged, or who has witnessed the way another has been, may redress injustice by testifying to one's struggle against it. In telling Achak's story, the novel endeavors to declare his humanity against the 'inhumanity' he has suffered.[1] Imploring the reader, "Since you [reader] and I [the real life incarnation of the fictional narrator] exist, together we can make a difference!" (xv), the preface reveals how literary humanitarianism is premised on a relationship between text and reader that treats literature as testimony and the reader as a witness to trauma.[2] The novel testifies to Achak's suffering and details how his development has been stunted by conflicts between warring factions. Along with the accompanying preface, the novel suggests that the injustices Achak has experienced may be overcome through the process of writing him into the collective psyches of the book's readership. Eggers, an American author turned activist, takes up this project by partnering with Achak to tell his story after he has arrived as a refugee in the US.

The positive reception of the novel demonstrates the widespread acceptance of the human rights conception of justice in popular culture. In fact, the novel was met with acclaim for facilitating literary humanitarianism. For instance, the *New York Times* commends the text: "*What Is the What* is an extraordinary work of witness, and of art" (Francine Prose). As a work of witness, the novel testifies to Achak's suffering, inviting the reader to be a third-party witness in order to validate his humanity against the 'inhumanity' he has endured. As a work of art it enlarges the scope of the juridical, insisting literature may fulfill a social justice function. The justice the novel seeks is conceptualized within a rights paradigm, meaning human rights discourse constitutes the framework through which Achak's story may be told.

As a refugee seeking to rectify the injustices he experienced, Achak is compelled to testify to an international community of humanitarian readers about his state's failure to protect his human rights. Because rights are allocated through the state, the rights paradigm reduces individuals to juridical subjects, and the international human rights movement attempts to regulate the way states allocate 'universal' rights to these subjects. By relegating the political to the juridical, the rights model of justice generates a paradox in which individuals may only gain rights by submitting their autonomy to the state and subjecting themselves to its normative parameters. Literary humanitarianism, in turn, requires individuals to narrate themselves in a way that is legible to the state in order to prove their eligibility for rights. In Achak's case this means allowing himself to be translated into a literary form that endeavors to unite a cosmopolitan readership in support of an international human rights project that promises "to improve the lives of Sudanese in Sudan and elsewhere" (Eggers xiv). As human rights discourse increasingly

structures articulations of political violence, Eggers's novel has become representative of a growing number of texts that present stories of suffering as literary testimony in order to appeal for rights.

"Narrative States" examines contemporary Anglophone literary representations of political violence directed against migrants, refugees, and former colonial subjects in Africa, the Caribbean, and the India subcontinent. Rather than assume that the language of human rights is neutral, I read the increased circulation of human rights discourse in the literature that I critique as a symptom of the conflict between national and international sovereignty. I approach testimony as a narrative mode that reflects and shapes power relations between nation-states, national citizens, international collectivities, and extra-national individuals.

When popular, literary, and scholarly accounts of international violence, inequality, and injustice are structured as testimonial narratives within a human rights framework, they disconnects suffering from its political and economic contexts. In contrast, my study considers how such political crises are connected to histories of colonialism as well as to the growth of multinational capital. Viewed in this context, I argue, human rights discourse depoliticizes failures of development. Moreover, when this discourse employs literary texts to assert rights, it plots individuals in a narrative of universal humanism that casts agents alongside dependents. Such literature presents itself as testimony, enlarging the category of "witness" to include privileged, "humanitarian" readers. At the same time, it marks members of a transnational underclass as perpetually dependent on humanitarianism.

My investigation of human rights discourse examines literary testimony alongside texts that challenge this discourse as they narrate the structural inequalities that characterize the postcolonial condition. Joseph Slaughter has already shown a connection between the Western reader's demand for stories of postcolonial development and "literary humanitarianism," which he identifies with the *bildungsroman* (314). I expand Slaughter's notion of literary humanitarianism beyond the *bildungsroman* to reframe the discussion of human rights through a critique of testimonial narrative structure. Engaging literature that presents itself as testimony, its narrator as one who testifies, and its reader as a witness to testimony, I challenge the assumption that one may perform a humanitarian act by reading, and thereby witnessing, stories of trauma and suffering. My interrogation of human rights discourse in "Narrative States" is focused through analyses of texts that problematize the narrative conventions of literary humanitarianism.

My examination of the narrative mechanics of literary humanitarianism, and some of its exemplary alternatives, spans contemporary novels, nonfiction prose, and epic poetry. Charting the narrator–reader relationship across the first two narrative forms, the opening two chapters of this project critique the universal humanist narrative voice and the humanitarian reader. Rather than asking literature to archive political violence as trauma through a testimonial exchange with a humanitarian reader, chapter three interrogates the way different methodological approaches to storytelling engage the archive and lived reality. Continuing to work through the intersections of fiction, historiography, and testimony central to the opening chapters of "Narrative States," in the final two chapters, I show how contemporary texts re-imagine conventional literary forms

such as the postcolonial development novel and popular genres such as the refugee narrative.

Instead of approaching the relationship between literature and human rights through a study of the cathartic process at issue in trauma theory,[3] I probe the rights framework through a critique of its relationship to historical and contemporary imperialism. Representing political violence in terms of trauma too often renders politically complicated histories unspeakable and attempts instead to heal trauma victims by articulating their humanity against the supposed inhumanity of those who have inflicted the trauma. This study responds to the ethical turn in literature and political philosophy by analyzing the intersection of postcoloniality and human rights discourse in contemporary literature. Rather than debating the cathartic and political efficacy of human rights, I identify the literary and historical contexts within which this discourse operates and how dissenting narratives re-imagine the ethico-political.

The genealogy of human rights is deeply intertwined with the history of the nation-state. In the mid-twentieth century there was a transition from nation-based modern human rights, as they are articulated in the late eighteenth century French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* and the US American *Declaration of Independence*, to contemporary international human rights, which are outlined in the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). Modern human rights, which were conceived as natural law, were established along with the modern nation-state, and they were based in Kantian ideas about rational man being guided by moral truths and Lockean notions of a social contract with the state. Modern human rights reinforced the sovereignty of the nation-state by locating rights in the state.

Contemporary human rights emerged after World War II with the UDHR, which positivized individual human rights in international law. The institutionalization of contemporary human rights law put into place a structure through which international governance could challenge state sovereignty in order to protect individuals from the state. Notably, the international human rights regime has increasingly challenged state sovereignty since decolonization, during which time post-independence states have been attempting to establish their sovereignty against former colonial powers and the increasingly influential forces of multinational capital.

The expansion of contemporary human rights is indicative of a significant transformation in the current political landscape. Discussions of late twentieth and early twenty-first century globalization have supported the notion that a shift is underway from a nation-state-based political system to, what Arjun Appadurai terms, "a postnational political world" (22). While Appadurai's observation that collectivities are expanding beyond the boundaries of the state is certainly true, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's more nuanced understanding of the changing role of the nation-state reveals that human rights violations are actually a symptom of the conflict between the nation and the state that has resulted from the evolution of capital.

Spivak notices that the state is bound by financial commitments to international entities, and it serves these rather than the nation. Describing "the loosened hyphen between nation and state," Spivak explains, "the latter is mortgaged further and further by the forces of financialization" (*A Critique* 364). So, states now have more of a vested interest in global capital than in the nation. Yet, according to Spivak, the "genealogical force" of the nation-state persists in the way a managerial state oversees the movement of

capital on the free market (Butler and Spivak 79). The state is still structured by the nation, but the growth of global capital has shifted the priorities of states. As states attempt to harness global capital they too often compromise the wellbeing of the nation in order to manage the flow of capital.

As the best interests of the nation and state diverge, there is greater pressure on cultural narratives to redefine the relationship between nation and state in a way that resolves the conflict between the two. As Spivak notes, "the lines of contact between imperialism and de-colonization on the one hand, and the march of world capitalism on the other, constitute the most encompassing crisis of narrative today – the problem of producing plausible stories so business can go on as usual" (*A Critique* 340). Neoliberal narratives that present free trade as a way to develop struggling nations promise the benefits of capitalism to those inside and outside 'developing' nations, and in this way they help to gain support for business as usual. Furthermore, couching development talk within a narrative of human rights (as if development facilitates the recognition of human rights) depoliticizes the failures of development and dissociates suffering from the socioeconomic conditions that result from economic imperialism.[4] By diffusing the crises that neoliberal economic policies fail to resolve and often exacerbate, human rights discourse reinforces a development narrative, which casts free trade as the progenitor of universal economic development, as a plausible story.

The discourse that supports the "juridico-legal arm" of "extra-state collective action" (Butler and Spivak 83) often locates rights in shared humanity,[5] but human rights exhibit a tension between national and international sovereignty that undermines the notion that rights are inherent to humanity.[6] In the mid-twentieth century Hannah Arendt

noticed the paradox of rights: in order to claim rights an individual must be endowed with the "right to have rights" (294). This right to have rights is tied to the nation-state, for as Arendt shows, human rights are actually the rights of citizens (297). International organizations and institutions endeavor to require nation-states to enforce human rights law.

Besides making attempts to regulate how states allocate rights, the contemporary human rights movement increasingly focuses on humanitarianism in an effort to provide aid and relief for those whose rights are not being met. Humanitarianism attempts to separate rights from national citizenship and depoliticize conflicts by treating people as bodies in need. In short, it endeavors to transcend struggles between competing sovereignties by imagining a post-national world and invoking a universal human. As Wendy Brown recognizes, humanitarian activism "presents itself as something of an antipolitics" (453) and "casts subjects as yearning to be free of politics" (456). However, the right to have rights generates politically situated subjects who become part of struggles between national and international sovereignties.

Brown distinguishes between the discourse of human rights, which portrays human rights efforts as politically neutral, and the political realities in which human rights projects operate, noting: "rights are not just defenses against social and political power but are, as an aspect of governmentality, a crucial aspect of power's aperture. As such, they are not simply rules and defenses against power, but can themselves be tactics and vehicles of governance and domination" (459). 'Politically neutral' rights language is deployed to support conflicting agendas, and Brown insists, "there is no such thing as *mere* reduction of suffering or protection from abuse – the nature of the reduction or

protection is itself productive of political subjects and political possibilities (460). Rather than being politically neutral, human rights discourse categorizes and disciplines individuals according to various political motives.

I investigate the literary interactions of the political subjects who populate the dominant narrative of human rights, keeping in mind Spivak's point that human rights produce both agents and dependents and Alain Badiou's explanation of the 'universal' human as a split subject made up of victims and benefactors (Spivak "Righting" 1; Badiou 12–13). I locate agents and dependents and victims and benefactors in literary texts, concentrating especially on the narrator and reader. My analysis of the political relationship between these figures is informed by debates about state sovereignty and political possibilities, to which Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler have made contributions. Whereas Agamben's discussion of sovereignty focuses on the positions of the *homo sacer* and the sovereign in relation to the rule of law,[7] Butler acknowledges people are more than the identities the law assigns, and the law cannot render life bare.

For Agamben humanitarianism keeps the refugee a refugee: "humanitarian organizations… can only grasp human life in the figure of bare or sacred life, and therefore, despite themselves, maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight" (Agamben 133). Indeed, an important premise of this dissertation is that human rights projects do not resolve the inequalities that generate violence, and they sometimes even maintain or extend conditions of inequality. But, rather than understanding the refugee, or others who lack the right to have rights, as bare life as Agamben does, I concur with Butler who argues, "[n]o one is ever returned to bare life, no matter how destitute the situation becomes, because there are a set of powers that

produce and maintain this situation of destitution, dispossession, and displacement" (Butler and Spivak 10). Butler insists the very marking of a person as bare life means this person is not bare life. She clarifies: "they are without legal protection but in no way relegated to a 'bare life': this is a life steeped in power… power is not the same as law" (8–9). Butler observes that even if the law does not recognize a person, he or she is still subject to the machinations of power.

The popular discourse of human rights that I critique attempts to extend the juridical into a literary space by requiring representations of political violence and inequality to adhere to a testimonial narrative structure. Joseph Slaughter's findings concerning the relationship between human rights law and literature provide useful background for my literary analysis of human rights discourse and the testimonial narrative structure. He argues that human rights law and the *Bildungsroman* are "mutually enabling fictions" (4), and both attempt "to imagine, normalize, and realize what the Universal Declaration and early theorists of the novel call 'the free and full development of the human personality'" (4). He notices both assume "to become a subject (a freely and fully developed person) within a particular sociopolitical formation is to be capable of fully exercising the rights enabled by that formation, which entails, at the same time, a 'free' submission to its norms" (9). Slaughter demonstrates that the common narrative trajectory of both human rights law and the *Bildungsroman* presumes it is through development that one may achieve the subject's right to have rights. He identifies a structural analogy between fiction and law and facilitates a discussion about the way novels that subscribe to a developmental logic reinforce the idea that nations, and their subjects, are located at various points along a developmental trajectory. Whereas

Slaughter analyzes the institutionalization of contemporary human rights, I am interested in the more recent popularization of the language of human rights.

Rather than further analyzing the relationship between human rights law and literature, I focus on what Samuel Moyn calls the "vernacularization" (218–19) of human rights. This dissertation is concerned with the increased circulation of the language of human rights and how this *popular* discourse operates in literature. As Moyn has shown, the expansion of the language of human rights began in the late 1970s and is connected to the perceived failure of anti-colonial nationalism.[8] By this moment, Moyn explains, "self-determination, like other transformative political utopias, had lost its appeal to Western observers, especially because of its frequently violent outcomes. An idealism based on human rights served as an alternative" (173). This dissertation asks how this "idealism based on human rights" (173) shapes contemporary literary articulations of political violence, inequality, and injustice in the postcolony.

As human rights discourse has entered the popular lexicon, literature has become a space from which to do the work of the contemporary human rights movement. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith reveal how heavily "human rights discourses, norms, and instruments depend upon the international commitment to narratability" (3). They explain, "for rights discourse to become activated victims need to come forward and testify" (3), and they regard literature as an opportunity for victims to do so. Arguing for the effectiveness of what they call "life narratives" (1), they proclaim:

> These stories demand that readers attend to histories, lives, and experiences often vastly different from their own. As people meet together and tell stories, or read stories across cultures, they begin to voice, recognize, and bear witness to a diversity of values, experiences, and ways of imagining a just social world and of responding to injustice, inequality, and human suffering. Indeed, over the last

> twenty years, life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims (1).

Celebrating storytelling as testimony, Schaffer and Smith exhibit a hope that persists in the contemporary human rights movement: that autobiographical texts, third-person narrative accounts, and novels detailing trauma will function as testimony, and a cathartic exchange between a testifying narrator and a reader-witness will inspire people to remedy injustice.

While narrative certainly can unite people in an imagined community of readers, the relationship that the human rights framework constructs between the narrator and reader is problematic. Even if its readers engage in more than a literary humanitarianism in which they fulfill their perceived function by reading alone, problems arise in the way agency is assigned. A testimonial narrative structure distributes agency disproportionately amongst narrators, readers, and those who may not be either and are more likely part of an underclass in need of rights. This creates an imagined community of readers that corresponds to a privileged class, which cuts across national boundaries and divisions between 'developed' and 'developing' worlds.[9] For this imagined community of humanitarian readers, united by economic privilege and called upon to relieve the suffering Other, the language of human rights is an innocuous way to protest injustice and inequality without disrupting structures of global capitalism.

This dissertation not only argues against narrating and reading political violence in terms of human rights but also asks how literature might decouple what it means to be human from its normative discursive framing and in doing so re-imagine the ethico-political. Because there are many ways of being human, difference should not undermine an individual's humanity, and one should not have to prove this humanity. However,

within the human rights framework difference (including subalternity) often puts an individual's humanity into question and forecloses the right to have rights. This dissertation explores the potential of a posthumanist mode of narrating and reading. The purpose of such a methodology is to critique the frameworks through which humanism reproduces an exclusionary 'universal' that enables dehumanization, discrimination, and subalternity. As Bart Simon clarifies, "the posthuman is figured not as a radical break from humanism, in the form of neither transcendence nor rejection, but rather as implicated in the ongoing critique of what it means to be human" (8).[10] I ask what it means to be human in the postcolony and how challenging normative conceptions of the human might offer a way to rethink the portrayal of political violence as trauma and shift the focus from the spectacle of suffering onto the harmful material conditions, government policies, and transnational business practices that generate suffering. Moreover, I consider how reframing inequality and injustice through posthumanist narrative analysis might provide a useful way to critique contemporary forms of imperialism.

My first two chapters problematize the way the human rights paradigm equates narrative voice with agency and allows a privileged reader to contemplate suffering as evidence of a universal ethical crisis rather than a situated political conflict. Chapter one, "Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace*," critiques the way human rights discourse treats narrative voice as a metaphor for agency and requires individuals to perform a particular subjectivity to access rights. While *Foe* problematizes the project of writing back for reinforcing the agency of those who speak *for* the subaltern, *Disgrace* destabilizes the

supremacy of the 'universal' humanist narrative voice as it comments on post-apartheid South Africa's public, political staging of human rights. *Disgrace* gestures toward a posthumanist implementation of justice by refusing to personify the endangered dogs its main character attempts to honor and by undermining the verifiability of cognitive assumptions.

Moving from narrator to reader, chapter two, "Witnessing Political Violence: Literary Testimony and the Crisis of the Humanitarian Reader," argues that the narrative structure of literary humanitarianism encourages privileged readers to contemplate suffering as a depoliticized crisis of the imagination. I detail how Philip Gourevitch's account of genocide in Rwanda and Antjie Krog's representation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa present political violence as unspeakable trauma and attempt to overcome it by engaging a humanitarian reader. Then, I analyze how Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* challenges such a project by mixing the metaphors of seeing and hearing, unsettling 'the human,' and critiquing humanitarian journalism for effacing economic and political realities like those of the 1984 gas leak in Bhopal, India.

Following these critiques of literary testimony and the inequality it reinforces between narrator and reader, chapter three, "Literature and the Archive: Narrating Uncertainty in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*," compares conflicting narrative methodologies for engaging the historical archive in the transition out of apartheid. I show how Wicomb's novel transgresses a rights framework as it explores the relationship between archival memory and political reality in post-apartheid South Africa. The novel presents gender as a metaphor that illustrates different approaches for representing

apartheid-era violence. I argue that *David's Story* is able to confront taboo apartheid-era torture, sexual abuse, and systemic gender inequality within the political party that led the country out of apartheid, because it rejects the idealized humanist narrative of a "New South Africa" and reinterprets ruptures within the archive as openness to unknown political possibilities.

While the previous chapters show how human rights discourse depoliticizes violence and fetishizes suffering related primarily to armed conflict, chapter four, "Narrating Transnational Identity and Remapping the Postcolonial in Three Caribbean Texts," asks how representations of contemporary economic and cultural imperialism may resist literary humanitarian readings. I analyze how Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* challenge the rubric of human rights as they narrate histories of colonialism and continued economic and cultural imperialism. Together these texts not only reveal how the supremacy of transnational capital exploits postcolonial subjects regardless of their humanity and national citizenship, but they also reveal the limitations of identity politics and imagine what revolution might look like in the postcolony.

My discussion of economic and cultural imperialism in chapter four leads me to ask in chapter five what happens when the postcolonial subject seeks refuge from the inequalities and injustices in the postcolony as part of a new diaspora. Chapter five, "Refugee Stories: Contemporary Imperialism and the New Diaspora," reveals how Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* problematize cultural narratives about the contemporary refugee whose migration occurs after decolonization. Rather than rigidly defining people and states as victims, perpetrators, or

saviors, these refugee narratives enact a politics beyond the limited frame of the juridical. They destabilize the boundaries of victimhood and reveal the complexities of a new diaspora that cannot simply be collapsed into the nation-state system. I synthesize the critiques I present in "Narrative States" as I analyze how Gurnah's and Danticat's novels plot the transnational intersection of postcoloniality and human rights and unhinge representation from individual subjectivity. These novels provide compelling evidence that the value of literature is not in staging humanitarian resolutions but in interrogating the logical frameworks that sustain inequality.

CHAPTER ONE

Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace*

Human Rights discourse recognizes storytelling as a technology of both empowerment and subordination. It situates literature as an important site from which to assert one's rights and plots individuals within a narrative of universal humanism. In order to lay claim to human rights, individuals must write themselves into the humanist narrative by successfully articulating themselves as fully developed human persons. In this chapter I analyze narrative voice in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace*. Both novels acknowledge the implications of speaking and being spoken in a story: *Foe* conceptually and historically in relation to structures of imperialism and patriarchy and *Disgrace* in the contemporary, ethically and politically complicated context of post-apartheid South Africa. I frame my reading of these texts through the problematics of testimony and discuss how this discursive apparatus for achieving the "right to have rights" structures the way stories addressing political violence and inequality may and may not be told.[11] I elaborate on the way each of these novels rejects a testimonial function for literature by declining to make silenced voices speak and by forcing the reader to dwell within the unsettling paradox of the unspeakable. Both novels depict fragments and offer glimpses of voices that cannot be fully articulated within current discursive structures. Rather than forcing the encapsulation of a voice that is made to speak according to a fixed rights framework, *Foe* and *Disgrace* call attention to the inadequacy of the testimonial narrative voice to transform the conditions about which it speaks.

Coetzee's writing in these two novels aims not to develop and introduce subaltern voices so as to supplement or broaden a narrow humanist universal, but instead to interrogate this universal and appeal for a posthumanist articulation of political violence. *Foe* reveals the ultimate futility of attempting to insert new narrators within the framework of human rights to expand the notion of the universal human. The novel suggests it is necessary instead to question the way narrative functions within this framework. As it encounters the limitations of the postcolonial project of writing back to master narratives, *Foe* casts doubt on the cathartic and political potential of articulating one's experiences of oppression and trauma. In refusing to conform to the universal humanist framework that *Foe* challenges, *Disgrace* demonstrates the need for a posthumanist implementation of justice. Rather than concentrating on developing and integrating hitherto silenced narrative voices to inflate the humanist universal, the posthumanist approach toward which *Disgrace* gestures problematizes the application of narrative voice as a determinant of one's right to have rights. It thereby rejects the humanist ideal of personality development as a way to define proper subject formation.[12]

Written in late-apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, respectively, *Foe* (1986) and *Disgrace* (1999) not only comment on the power dynamics of storytelling but are also caught up in arguments over the political responsibilities that literature should fulfill. In fact, the most prominent debate that structures analyses of Coetzee's fiction is whether or not it appropriately addresses apartheid. As Brian Macaskill and Jeanne Colleran explain, "The charge most commonly leveled against Coetzee by South African critics is that of political quiescence, of producing novels that neither sufficiently address nor affirm the contiguities between the literary domain and historical-economic political

realities" (432). Michael Marais seconds this evaluation, specifying, "During the 1980s, a perennial criticism of Coetzee's fiction was that it did not engage with the depredations of apartheid" ("From the Standpoint" 229).[13] A considerable amount of scholarship is also devoted to responding to this contention.[14] Samuel Durrant insists the fiction Coetzee writes is in conversation with the political reality of apartheid. He suggests, "Coetzee's novels testify to the suffering engendered by apartheid precisely by refusing to translate that suffering into narrative" (430–1). As a white South African of a relatively privileged class, Coetzee perhaps self-consciously does not attempt to narrate the perspectives of black or coloured South Africans. Instead, he presents metanarratives that comment on the complications of trying to speak for people whose position one does not inhabit. Thus, his literary works not only analyze relationships of power in South Africa, but are also relevant in trying to understand how human rights discourse shapes power dynamics more widely. While many critics comment on the way Coetzee's novels refuse to narrate the Other, I argue this refusal operates within and against an all-consuming discourse of human rights that threatens to overwrite non-normative perspectives by absorbing them into its teleology.

The human rights framework that *Foe* and *Disgrace* resist constructs testimony as a forum for establishing rights, and it assigns literature the responsibility of narrativizing testimony. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith discuss how heavily "human rights discourses, norms, and instruments depend upon the international commitment to narratability" (3). They explain, "for rights discourse to become activated victims need to come forward and testify" (3), and they regard literature as an opportunity for victims to do so. Arguing that literature is an effective form of testimony, they stress, "over the last

twenty years, life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims" (1).[15] In their celebration of storytelling as testimony, Schaffer and Smith exhibit a hope that persists in contemporary human rights movements: that autobiographical texts, third-person narrative reports, and novels detailing human rights abuses will function as testimony and that this evidence of suffering will inspire people to remedy injustice.

Writing back – a trend that emerges in the literature of the mid-twentieth century out of anti-colonial movements – reinforces the human rights construction of literature as testimony. Such literature, written from the perspective of the (post)colonial Other, poses increasing challenges to canonical Western literary representations that present the West as the ideal of universal humanism. Writing back becomes a way to establish agency and demand the right to have rights.[16] It focuses on recovering colonial or pre-colonial bodies and attempts to access the stories that colonialism silenced.[17] As Elleke Boehmer recognizes in her discussion of *Foe* in the early nineteen nineties, "in postcolonial nationalist discourses of the last number of decades, images of the scrutinized, scored subject body have become the focus of attempts at symbolic reversal and transfiguration. Representing its own silence, the colonized body speaks; uttering its wounds, it negates its muted condition" (272). Popularized in anti-colonial literature and supported by postcolonial criticism, this move to establish the authority of the colonial Other and write back to the imperial cultural apparatus is an important step in anti-colonial and early postcolonial movements.[18]

However, over time writing back has become a function of the human rights infrastructure insofar as it operates according to the notion that one may right a wrong by

invoking a discursive apparatus to speak the subaltern condition. In the fiction associated with writing back, the colonized body is "converted into language, often into autobiography" (Boehmer 272), which is ideally "a process not of reclamation only, but importantly of self-articulation, healing through speaking one's condition" (272). Human rights discourse promotes storytelling as a way to expose wrongs and overcome their traumatic effects. It suggests that by defining rights against wrongs, literature may claim rights for those who have previously been denied them within universal humanism.

Responding to the ethical turn in politics and philosophy, Alain Badiou offers an incisive critique of the human rights logic that supports the project of writing back.[19] Badiou undermines the existence of the "abstract Subject" (40) that universal humanism suggests is endowed with natural rights.[20] He argues, "There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject – or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject" (40). The construction of this subject, in turn, produces the idea of the Other who has not yet developed into a proper subject. Against humanitarianism's perception that it is "the uncivilized that demands of the civilized a civilizing intervention" (13), Badiou objects to the way "ethics requires that the Other be in some sense *carried by a principle of alterity*" (22). He instead posits, "Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*" (25). His theorization of "infinite alterity" challenges a rights framework that conceives of difference within a binary structure. He observes that human rights logic tolerates differences only insofar as they function within the boundaries of a 'universal' subject that is bifurcated into victims and saviors. Presumably, this split subject is united in its struggle against the 'Evil' that threatens to destroy the 'universal' human.[21] In the project of writing back, subaltern victims are

united with literary benefactors who are eager to challenge the various 'Evils' that inhibit proper subject development within the narrative of universal humanism. Writing back thus reinforces narrative voice as a determinant of proper subjectivity and reconstitutes the narrative of universal humanism.

Foe models the project of writing back, exposing not only the silences in a master narrative but also the complications of this premise. It reconfigures Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* by way of Susan Barton, a narrator culled from Defoe's *Roxana* and revealed as a fellow castaway on Cruso's island.[22] In *Foe* Susan pursues and even haunts Mr. Foe, who is already a well known author.[23] She beseeches him to compose a story about the time that Cruso, his servile companion Friday, and she were on the island. In letters, scattered recollections, and vaguely addressed musings that appear throughout the novel, Susan relays details about Cruso and Friday as well as her own arrival on the island. According to Susan, they were all rescued, but Cruso died aboard the ship that brought Friday and her to England. Susan is a complex character who experiences both subordination as a woman within a patriarchal society as well as privilege as a First-World subject within the system of imperialism. Throughout Coetzee's novel she relays the details of her story to Mr. Foe – who later presumably leaves her out of his novel *Robinson Crusoe*. But, in relation to Friday, who is mute in Coetzee's novel, Susan finds herself in a position of power. When she realizes the tale she hopes Mr. Foe will tell will be incomplete without Friday's story, she becomes obsessed with overcoming Friday's silence so that she might assert her own narrative authority. Her desperation to access Friday's story reveals how the project of writing back to *Robinson Crusoe* depends on a ventriloquism that attempts to speak that which remains unspeakable within the master

narrative. The novel thus both acknowledges the potential value of writing back and reveals its limit point.

My analysis of Coetzee's reinterpretation of *Robinson Crusoe* is informed by the connection Joseph Slaughter identifies between Defoe's novel and the definition of the 'universal' person in human rights law. Slaughter calls attention to the way the Third Committee of drafters of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) "extrapolated from *Crusoe* transcendent literary proof to substantiate their ideal of human personality development" (50).[24] Defoe's novel, to which Coetzee writes back in *Foe*, depicts Crusoe cultivating a 'civilized' space on an uninhabited island using salvaged tools and the labor of a 'native' from a nearby island who he captures and names Friday. Slaughter notes that the drafters of the UDHR pointed to Crusoe to support the idea that the rights-bearing human personality must be developed through a societal connection.[25] As Slaughter explains, "From the point of view of the law, 'person' is a technical term designating a 'right-and-duty-bearing unit'" (58).[26] Yet, if personhood is achieved through societal recognition, which the laws of a state formalize, human beings do not originate as "right-and-duty-bearing unit[s]" (58). Since human rights are not actually inherent, the human being must develop a legal personality by way of the state in order to establish what Hannah Arendt calls "the right to have rights" (294).[27] Contemporary human rights law, as it is articulated in the UDHR imposes a particular narrative trajectory. It upholds the Crusoe model as an ideal by which those without the right to have rights may gain recognition from a state.

While Slaughter briefly acknowledges the UDHR drafters' inattention to *Robinson Crusoe*'s Friday, he does so in order to make a point about their understanding

of Crusoe's human personality development, rather than to analyze Friday's subaltern condition (and he also does not reference *Foe*).[28] In his discussion of the UDHR drafters' interpretation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Slaughter limits his commentary regarding Friday in order to focus primarily on the relationship between contemporary human rights law and the *bildungsroman*. He identifies these forms of law and literature as "mutually enabling fictions" (4) that project a humanist ideal of personality development.[29] I consider Friday in more depth to show how the Crusoe model that substantiates human rights law relies on Friday's subjugation. I build on Slaughter's observations regarding *Robinson Crusoe*'s impact on the UDHR and his discussion of the *bildungsroman* insofar as I approach *Foe* as a refusal to articulate a postcolonial *bildungsroman* through Friday. *Foe* shows that both Cruso's and Susan's personhood depend on Friday's subjugation. Friday's personhood may only be established if he subjects himself to a narrative trajectory through which he overcomes his supposed savagery. The novel thus provides an opportunity to both analyze the postcolonial project of writing back to the false universal that *Robinson Crusoe* establishes and to understand the need to move beyond writing back.

Foe stages the project of writing back via Susan since Friday does not speak. It imagines a scenario in which Friday, with Susan as his witness and sponsor, might parrot Cruso's supposedly universal narrative voice to establish himself as a fully developed person. However, it refuses to follow through with this narrative trajectory. Instead of portraying Friday's personal development via Susan, who also attempts to subject Friday to her will, *Foe* exposes the politics that narrative voice takes on in a postcolonial critique that is structured by the discourse of human rights. Susan's attempts to establish her own

rights by speaking for Friday reveal the internal hierarchy within the human rights movement. Representative of a particular feminist agenda to empower women as agents of universal humanism, Susan seeks to administer the development of Friday's narrative voice in order to establish her own authority.

In order to understand the hierarchy within which a human rights framework positions Friday and Susan, I invoke Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to distinguish between the subaltern who cannot speak from within the discourse of human rights and those oppressed persons whose citizenship and class position allow them to engage the rights infrastructure. Spivak emphasizes the distinction between the term "subaltern" and "oppressed" or "Other." She reminds those who conflate these terms that subalternist historians define subaltern as "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism" (Spivak in Leon De Kock 45). Moreover, she clarifies that her argument that the subaltern cannot speak is based on the premise that the subaltern are those who are denied dialogue within the hegemonic discourse.[30] In terms of human rights, Friday represents the subaltern who are denied the right to have rights. In contrast, Susan, who is able to engage in dialogue to work against her own and Friday's subordination, is not subaltern; her right to have rights is recognized, even if some or all of her rights are ultimately not honored.[31]

Susan's right to have rights is accentuated by Friday's condition of subalternity. She acknowledges the disparity between Friday and herself as she attempts to explain their different silences to Mr. Foe:

> You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silences and the silences of a being such as Friday. Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal[...] what he is to the

> world is what I make of him. Therefore the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born. Whereas the silence I keep regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful: it is my own silence (Coetzee, *Foe* 121–2).

For most of the narrative Susan is able to exercise both her right to speak and to remain silent about those things that she chooses. Her moments of silence in *Foe* (like Lucy's in *Disgrace*, which I discuss later in this chapter) are primarily a matter of choice, while Friday's silence is imposed upon him. Friday cannot speak within either the discourse of colonialism in Defoe's master narrative or within the rights discourse that writes back to that master narrative. He is figured as a "child unborn" (122), because he is unable to articulate himself as a fully formed subject. Having "no command of words" imprisons him in a "helpless silence" (122). In one sense this suggests that his silence renders him helpless, meaning subaltern. But, it also implies that there is no help for this silence and that subalternity itself cannot be helped – meaning it cannot be prevented or eradicated because it serves a function.

The subaltern condition cannot be helped so long as human rights discourse fetishizes the subaltern. In this vein Mr. Foe points out to Susan, "We deplore the barbarism of whomever maimed him, yet have we, his later masters, not reason to be secretly grateful? For as long as he is dumb we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us, and continue to use him as we wish" (148). By establishing narrative voice as a measure of one's right to have rights and then determining which stories may be articulated and how, human rights discourse disallows narrative voices like Friday's that do not fit within its discursive framework. In turn, it allows some, such as Friday's "later masters" (148), to articulate their own agency as humanitarians by working for the development of subaltern voices. Thus, human rights discourse surfaces as literary

humanitarianism in the project of writing back.[32] Mr. Foe continues, "as it was a slaver's stratagem to rob Friday of his tongue, may it not be a slaver's stratagem to hold him in subjection while we cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless? [...] Friday follows you: you do not follow Friday. The words you have written and hung around his neck say he is set free; but who, looking at Friday, will believe them?" (150). When literary narratives attempt to speak for the subaltern by plotting their development as a challenge to a master narrative, literature holds those in a position such as Friday's "in subjection" (150). Writing back can only expose Friday's subalternity, and it actually keeps him subaltern because it is stuck in the moment of identifying this subalternity.

Through the relationship between Susan and Friday, the novel shows how literary humanitarianism actually sustains subalternity as it attempts to aid the subaltern by speaking for them. The testimonial narrative on which literary humanitarianism depends produces some as agents and some as dependents. As Spivak remarks, "'Human Rights' is not only about having or claiming a right or a set of rights, it is also about righting wrongs, about being the dispenser of these rights" (Spivak, "Righting" 169), and "the work of righting wrongs is shared above a class line that to some extent and unevenly cuts across race and the North-South divide" (171).[33] Because there is great power in allocating rights, concentrating this power above a class line results in a kind of stratification that associates economic privilege with an inherent right to allocate rights. This in turn naturalizes the connection between poverty and a lack of rights. Within the contemporary context in which Coetzee inserts Susan as a character in the *Robinson Crusoe* narrative, she is representative of those above a class line who work to right wrongs.

Susan initially appears to be a figure who will challenge *Robinson Crusoe* on behalf of all those whom that master narrative renders unspeakable. She is able to articulate the feminist project of women's empowerment by establishing her position within the master narrative and exposing its patriarchy. However, though Susan's story is incomplete without Friday's, she cannot tell his story for him. She thus laments, "To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost!" (Coetzee, *Foe* 67). Friday's continued subjection reveals a problem with the hegemonic discourse of human rights. As Susan expands the universal to include women, she reinforces the authority of a liberal humanist narrative voice. Those like Friday who do not articulate themselves within the confines of this voice are excluded from structures that promise rights. In her effort to help Friday express himself, Susan imposes a testimonial narrative structure that forecloses other narrative possibilities. This is problematic because, as Spivak asserts, "you don't give the subaltern voice. You work *for* the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 46). Ultimately, rather than imagining Susan speaking for Friday, the novel focuses on his silence. It brings this silence to the fore but declines to fill it by constructing a story for Friday to tell. *Foe* thus calls attention to Friday's subaltern condition so as to challenge subalternity itself. It analyzes a particular moment, dwelling in it, rather than attempting to expand the boundaries of the 'universal' human by depicting Friday's testimonial narrative.

Foe not only acknowledges the distinct position of subalternity, but also questions the very agency of narrative voice. Whereas it seems at first that Susan will be

empowered as a narrator in *Foe*, in the end she recognizes that she has gone from speaking her story to being spoken as a story. She appeals to Mr. Foe to relay the story she wants to tell rather than turn her into a story, arguing,

> I am not a story, Mr Foe… my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water[…] which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island[…] for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire (Coetzee, *Foe* 131).

Susan insists that she should not have to provide "proof" that she is "a substantial being," but as it turns out, she is not free to tell her story "according to her own desire" (131). Rather, her narrative voice takes on symbolic meaning that renders her an abstraction – a literary device deployed to participate in a larger political debate. She thus remarks, "In the beginning I thought I would tell you the story of the island and, being done with that, return to my former life. But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me… Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me?" (133). Susan has become a story so much so that she is no longer a person in her own right. She instead finds herself to be a device through which to write back to a master narrative: she is "doubt itself" (133) undermining *Robinson Crusoe*. Her narrative in *Foe* is contained in quotes; she asks, "Who is speaking me?" (133); and she ruminates, "When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso. Is that the fate of all storytellers?" (51). For Susan, storytelling becomes a form of witnessing in which she disappears. She becomes a mechanism through which the text bears witness to the relationship between Cruso and Friday and to the gendered and raced erasures that occur in the grand narrative of universal humanism. In terms of the way that

testimony functions in the human rights framework, Susan is an example of a witness disappearing in the shadow of her testimony. Though she attempts to speak her story, she is ultimately spoken by the discursive framework of human rights.

While Susan's efforts to speak her own and Friday's story in *Foe* shows how human rights discourse defines the way individuals are able to express themselves, *Disgrace* considers how speaking a story and being spoken within a story materializes in the political circumstances of contemporary South Africa. In this former settler colony where apartheid structured the relationship between the former colonizer and formerly colonized, a new post-apartheid nationalism invokes *ubuntu* in its attempts to unite a nation divided by institutionalized racial violence.[34] Its Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings lauded narrative voice as a way to testify to the occurrence of apartheid-era violence and reconcile a divided and traumatized nation. *Disgrace* problematizes the TRC's use of narrative voice, challenging the logic of human rights that informs it and suggesting it is necessary to implement a posthumanist perspective to address suffering and violence.[35]

In *Disgrace* David Lurie narrates his fall from a position of influence and power.[36] Initially a university professor who deploys poetry to assert and excuse his sexual domination over women, he becomes a "dog-man" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 146). He is not only fired but also burned, robbed, and violated (insofar as he reads his daughter Lucy's violation as his own) by three attackers who invade Lucy's home. Analyzing *Foe*'s Susan and *Disgrace*'s Lucy side-by-side illuminates the complexities and the stakes of speaking versus being spoken.[37] Each of these women may choose to speak or not to speak within the normative discursive framework, and from a relatively privileged

position each may challenge the politics of human rights that structure narrative voice. Lucy, however, refuses a disappearance into a symbolic abstraction similar to that which Susan experiences in *Foe*. Whereas Susan struggles against being portrayed solely as a story as she fights to have her story told, Lucy declines to speak within a rights framework. *Disgrace* thus takes a stand against converting Lucy into a narrative device within a politically charged post-apartheid story.

Lucy's refusal to speak about her rape by two of the three attackers who invade her home enrages her father, David. He regrets that the rapists' story is circulating rather than Lucy's, and he worries, "Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for" (115). David is outraged that Lucy is being spoken rather than speaking, because in the rapists' story Lucy is further degraded. She is cast as having deserved that which was done to her, and each time the story is told her violation is repeated.

What David does not acknowledge is that he is speaking Lucy within *his* story. He is like Lucy's rapists not just in forcing himself on his student, Melanie Isaacs. He also bears a similarity to them by telling a story in which Lucy is figured as an object of ownership in a struggle between men on varying sides of a political conflict. He positions Lucy's rape within a narrative defined by racial politics and characterizes it as an act of vengeance for apartheid. To David, Lucy's refusal to speak her story is an admission of feelings of white guilt for apartheid. He argues that she must speak about her rape because otherwise she will be indicating that she is seeking salvation through acceptance of her rapists' account of the attack. He thus reads her rape symbolically, suggesting that

it is crucial that she participate in shaping how it will be interpreted. David struggles to negotiate control over the symbolic meaning of Lucy's rape because to him her rape is part of *his* fall into disgrace; he regards it as his own violation. Lucy protests this, admonishing her father:

> You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions (198).

Lucy resists being assigned a symbolic meaning and cast as a character in David's story. She is adamant that it is her decision to speak or not to speak about her rape or anything else in her life. She not only rebukes David for attempting to turn her experiences into episodes in the story of his life, she also refuses to be defined purely as a testifying voice and will not allow herself to be reduced to an allegorical figure of victimhood.

Ironically, though David is furious that Lucy's attackers are allowed to narrate her rape, he does not acknowledge that his account of his own transgressions against his student, Melanie, extends his domination over her. David is brought before a university disciplinary committee after he uses his position of authority to have sex with Melanie, for whom, he acknowledges, the sex is "undesired to the core" (25). In its depiction of the university hearing at which David is asked to respond to the grievances against him, *Disgrace* comments on the hearings the TRC held throughout South Africa as the apartheid system was being dismantled.[38] The novel records David's testimony, but since the events in it are focalized through David, it omits Melanie's account to the committee. In fact, *Disgrace* provides only glimpses of the effects that David's transgressions have had on Melanie. It never discloses her story and always shows David mediating her voice

himself or filtering it through her boyfriend, her father, the university, or the organization Women Against Rape.

By leaving Melanie's testimony out of the narrative, which is focalized through David, the novel shows how the testimonial process has failed to reconcile David's and Melanie's perspectives. Being faced with the accusations of Melanie's testimony and providing his own testimony to the committee does not cause David to discontinue his subjection of Melanie within the narrative account that he provides in the novel. Even after Melanie provides her testimony David is still able to control the story in *Disgrace*. The novel thus exposes a breakdown of the liberal humanist narrative voice and the testimonial structure within which it operates to address injustices. It suggests by proxy that the TRC hearings may not resolve conflicts on the ground level for those individuals who suffer the effects of the apartheid system and the violence that it institutionalized.

In its attempts to define Melanie's rights against David's wrongs, the committee offers David amnesty if he will provide a truth and reconciliation story that acknowledges wrongdoing and expresses repentance. The committee declares: "We would like to help you, David, to find a way out of what must be a nightmare" (52). In exchange for a confession given in "[a] spirit of repentance" (58), the committee will allow David to put his misdeeds behind him and continue as a professor. However, David is not willing to cooperate and instead retorts, "What goes on in my mind is my business, not yours… I make no confession. I put forward a plea, as is my right. Guilty as charged. That is my plea. That is as far as I am prepared to go" (51). He cites his "right" to put forward a plea, because "[t]here is a difference between pleading guilty to a charge and admitting you were wrong" (54). David poses his "right" to plead guilty rather than admit he is wrong

against the rights that the committee is attempting to define on Melanie's behalf. He clings to an outmoded juridical system whose boundaries have shifted in the era of the TRC. Citing "Freedom of speech. Freedom to remain silent" (188), he attempts to retreat to his former position of power. The novel thus illustrates how the right to speech and the right to silence are being redefined in post-apartheid South Africa.

David's inflexibility exhibits a clash between competing systems of meaning making. He is dumbfounded that the committee expects an affective response from him and argues, "I have said the words for you, now you want more, you want me to demonstrate their sincerity. That is preposterous. That is beyond the scope of the law" (55). The process by which the committee judges David's violation of Melanie's rights is beyond the scope of the law, because the law does not include a calculus for measuring the level or quality of emotion that David does or does not demonstrate. David continues to protest, "I won't do it. I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse" (58). David resists a reconciliation of the various worlds that he implies the committee is attempting to upend and meld together. It is as if he himself belongs "to another world, to another universe of discourse" (58). In his suddenly archaic world he was a master of discourse (and he abused this power). Now, however, David finds that the committee is deploying the discourse of universal humanism in an effort to reconcile his and Melanie's rights. By complicating the dialectic between rights and wrongs, the novel poses a question about whether rights are possible

for both the victim and victimizer. Judging rights against wrongs may actually relegate individuals to subjectivities within which they are spoken as either right or wrong.

Though both David and Lucy refrain from telling a truth and reconciliation story (he as a persecutor and she as a victim), David does not at first realize their positions in relation to each other. He begins to sense the correlation between Lucy's rape and his unwelcome sexual encounters with Melanie as Lucy's comments become more pointed. Lucy says to him, "You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her – isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder" (158). Indeed, David did "trap" Melanie. Part of the appeal of his former authority was that it allowed him to pursue his sexual desires without regard to the way their fulfillment impacted those whom he sought to possess. David even describes his impression that Melanie "had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration" (25) of one of their "undesired" (25) sexual encounters. So, the questions David considers as he recalls Lucy's words to him are loaded: "*You are a man, you ought to know*: does one speak to one's father like that? Are she and he on the same side?" (159). The novel thus exhibits how gender complicates the racial and political divides that have resulted from a history of apartheid. It also alludes to the fact that David's actions against Melanie and other women have perpetuated the gendering of power and powerlessness.[39]

David's resemblance to Lucy's attackers becomes clearer to him as he considers Lucy's rape from the point of view of her attackers but has difficulty conceiving of it from her position. The text reveals, "he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does

he have it in him to be the woman?" (160). David is reluctant to inhabit a position of powerlessness. He insists he knows what happened to Lucy, but he can only imagine it from the vantage point of the rapists. To "be the woman" would mean encountering the violent act Lucy was forced to absorb within her body. It would require him to admit his treatment of Melanie was wrong, empathize with the position he put her in, and comprehend how his actions have impacted her. Moreover, it would mean intimately understanding the powerlessness of such a violation rather than conceptualizing it in terms of a larger raced or gendered political narrative. As David struggles with this type of personal identification, the novel is careful not to reproduce a humanist framework through which he might receive absolution and reestablish his authority.

Disgrace acknowledges the political contexts in which both Melanie's and Lucy's violations occur, but unlike *Foe*'s use of Friday and Susan, *Disgrace* resists turning its character's experiences into allegories for larger political phenomena. These novels take up similar characters but plot them differently. *Foe* challenges the enlightenment narrative within which contemporary human rights law is rooted, while *Disgrace* disallows the perpetuation of the humanist framework that *Foe* problematizes. Both novels comment on the way that national politics impact individual lives. But, by depicting characters who refuse to deliver truth and reconciliation stories, *Disgrace* avoids conflating history and biography within a humanist approach to justice. In a comparison of each novel's characters, it is evident that both Susan and Lucy are in precariously gendered positions. They each struggle against male storytellers to define themselves. In turn, Mr. Foe and David each personify the authoritative voice of universal humanism. However, while Susan seeks validation for herself and Friday

through a testimonial narrative, Lucy refuses to speak herself through the discourse of human rights. And, while Friday occupies a position of subalternity in *Foe*, in *Disgrace* the dogs at the clinic where David volunteers stand in for those without the right to have rights. I will return to a discussion of the dogs in *Disgrace* shortly, because they form a crucial aspect of *Disgrace*'s posthumanist complication of the rights framework. However, in order to understand the implications of the posthumanist move in *Disgrace*, it is first necessary to recognize another significant parallel between the two novels.

Both *Foe* and *Disgrace* also explore music as a site for communicating that which seems incommunicable. In an attempt to reestablish his sense of purpose, David sets out to compose an opera. His opera reimagines the later years of the British Romantic poet Lord Byron's life from the unexplored perspective of Teresa, Byron's young mistress. Since Lucy prohibits David from telling her story and he is too self-absorbed to attempt to understand Melanie's, he believes "Teresa may be the last one left who can save him" (209). For David the project of locating Teresa's voice seems to be his last chance to reclaim his authority. His hope to hear Teresa's story in the music he composes resembles Susan's desire to hear Friday's story by conversing through what she regards as a musical collaboration (Coetzee, *Foe* 96). Susan soon admits the music they play is not only discordant but also that Friday has not been playing *with* her at all. David similarly concludes that he is incapable of hearing the meaning he seeks in his opera. And, though David contemplates the possibility that a future scholar might be able to recognize that which remains undetectable to him in his music, he acknowledges that his work will never have an audience.

In both novels art, in the form of music, fails to recover a lost voice or produce a voice for one who does not speak. Both texts stage the recovery of a figure from an already established narrative and an attempt to speak an unspoken story. David's partially-written opera repeats the structure of *Foe*, exhuming and reimagining Teresa as *Foe* does with Susan. Even the fact that David's opera in *Disgrace* is incomplete and will remain so echoes the way that Susan's story is scattered and appears throughout *Foe* as notes for a story that Mr. Foe will not write. In *Disgrace* David recognizes the disservice he has done to Teresa: "Poor Teresa! Poor aching girl! He has brought her back from the grave, promised her another life, and now he is failing her. He hopes she will find it in her heart to forgive him" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 214). Perhaps such regret at exhuming a character from the depths of the Western literary canon extends to Susan as well. The way David fails Teresa bears similarity to the way *Foe*, as a novel, fails Susan, who ultimately functions as a literary device in the political project of writing back. Even if one of the aims of *Foe* is to show how Susan is objectified in such a project, the novel still reproduces the process by which she is unwritten. *Disgrace* acknowledges this erasure and the extent to which the project of writing back is an exercise in establishing agency by way of another's dependency.

More importantly, *Disgrace* does not end with the success or even promise of David's opera redeeming him; it concludes instead with him as a "dog-man" (146) helping to euthanize and dispose of dogs at a clinic near Lucy's home. In turning to dogs, *Disgrace* presents a different plotting of the figures both novels depict. While Friday is compared to a dog several times in *Foe*,[40] emphasizing the way he is disregarded as a fully developed person through dehumanizing comparisons, *Disgrace* depicts actual dogs

to comment on the position of subalternity. This focus on dogs avoids reinforcing a racial or gender divide that marks one group as subordinate. Rather than speaking *for* a particular subaltern individual or group, the text highlights the *condition* of subalternity to question the humanist conceptualization of justice.

The text's challenge to subalternity takes shape as David considers how the dog corpses are handled. He disposes of their bodies himself in order to prevent the incinerator operators from using shovels to "beat [the] corpses into a more convenient shape for processing" (146). While he believes "[h]e saves the honour of the corpses" (146), David acknowledges, "[h]e may not be their saviour, the one for whom they are not too many, but he is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves" (146). Rather than regarding his care for the dogs as something that elevates him above them or rescues them, David approaches this work as a way to honor them. He accepts that he is not their savior and his capabilities are finite, but in caring for them he attempts in a small way to implement a posthumanist notion of justice.

Disgrace supports a posthumanist perspective insofar as it resists comparing all life to humans on an evolutionary scale that celebrates the ascendancy of man. Such humanist logic has been cited to elevate some humans over others, such as Friday, in a developmental narrative. *Disgrace* attempts to think outside of that framework. Thus, David "tries not to sentimentalize the animals he kills" (143) at the clinic, and the novel treats the dogs as dogs. It does not personify them or make them an equivalent to humans in some sort of evolutionary success story in which they are revealed to embody a legal personality and the right to have rights. Rather than calling for an extension of the rights

framework to animals, *Disgrace*'s portrayal of dogs calls attention to the condition of subalternity to which all life is vulnerable. As dogs they remain Other, unincorporated life forms outside of a humanist narrative, and the novel dwells in the ethical paradox that they pose.

The dogs at the clinic are disposed of because they are "too many" (146), the implication being that because of their perceived overpopulation there are not enough resources to care *for* them. *Disgrace* asks how the conception of justice might change if the focus were not on how to care *for* the dogs as dependents. Realizing he cannot be "the one for whom they are not too many" (146), David acknowledges his efforts to care *for* the dogs would be misplaced. Instead, he approaches them not as "too many" in terms of their population, but as "too many" insofar as they exceed the ethical boundaries within which current systems of justice operate.

Rather than trying to expand ethical boundaries, and thereby reinforce the logic that imposes them, David attempts to start from nothing. This becomes clear in the novel's last pages as David reflects on the impending death of a particular dog. Noting that saving this one dog would only mean another dog would die in its place, he decides not to postpone or prevent the euthanizing process. Instead, he decides he will carry the dog to the operating room, provide support and comfort, and see that the corpse is properly burnt; "[h]e will do all that for him when his time comes. It will be little enough, less than little: nothing" (220). The significance of this line near the end of the novel is informed by an earlier conversation between Lucy and David, in which she says, "Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity"

(205). He responds, "Like a dog" (205), and she confirms, "Yes, like a dog" (205). By the end of the novel David is beginning to come to terms with starting from nothing. To start at ground level with nothing, like a dog, means abandoning the developmental course along which all life is measured as lesser, equal, or greater than.

Disgrace does not offer a model for the kind of narrative that would provide such an alternative conceptualization, but it allows for the possibility of a reading that renders its narrative a posthumanist story. This opportunity surfaces because of the relationship the novel produces between the text and the reader. As Marais observes, "the novel seeks not to render futile the reader's endeavor to say the unsayable, to imagine the unimaginable, but rather to inscribe infinite distance between itself and its own reading, and thereby attempt to make of reading an event in which the reader encounters what exceeds the cognitive categories of his culture and over which he can thus exercise no control" ("Task of the Imagination" 88). Such a confrontation defies a humanist reality that operates according to the teleological conviction that man will ultimately conquer the unknowable and exhibit control over that which was hitherto out of his control.

Disgrace destabilizes the verifiability of cognitive assumptions. It compels its reader to make logical conclusions to determine key elements within its story. However, it refrains from verifying allusions as facts so that doubt lingers and undermines the reader's confidence in his or her cognitive reasoning. For example, the novel never says outright that Lucy is raped,[41] but her characterization as a lesbian and her pregnancy subsequent to the home invasion serve as clues from which to make an informed, but never confirmed, reading of the events.[42] By encouraging and even forcing its reader to construct meanings where it omits information, the novel showcases narration and

reading as distinct sites. Through a copious use of italics, the text also shows David continually reading, and more importantly often misreading, those whose stories he attempts to mediate. This further undermines the reliability of cognitive reasoning, which supports a humanist conception of reality. *Disgrace* draws attention to the way that narration and reading interact to produce meaning that is forever in flux and ultimately indeterminable. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the role of the reader and the textual exchange between narrator and reader.

This chapter has focused on narrative voice in particular, citing both *Foe* and *Disgrace* to illustrate how the master narrative of universal humanism defines the dominant discursive framework of human rights. Literary humanitarianism associates narrative voice with agency and endeavors to provide a space from which the subaltern might speak. However, by imposing a universal humanist narrative, it reinforces rather than challenges the subaltern condition. *Foe* questions the classic enlightenment narrative and problematizes the project of writing back to it; *Disgrace* comments on South Africa's public, political staging of human rights, resisting its discursive hegemony. Plotting similar characters within different stories, *Foe* and *Disgrace* stage the implications of being spoken within the discourse of human rights. They show how testimony, which materializes in postcolonial literature in the form of writing back, operates within a discursive framework that at once restricts which stories may be articulated and produces narrative voice as a gauge of one's right to have rights.

CHAPTER TWO

Witnessing Political Violence: Literary Testimony and the Crisis of the Humanitarian Reader

The startling title of Philip Gourevitch's 1998 nonfiction bestseller, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, exemplifies how stories that seek to cultivate humanitarianism establish an affective dialectic between the narrator as testifier and reader as witness. Commanding immediate attention, the title addresses the reader with an unsettling wish: to inform you about the killing of families. But, because these killings have actually already taken place, this is really a request for the reader to bear witness to the killings. Using the pronoun "We," the title also implies that those who wish to inform the reader are Rwandans who have themselves experienced genocidal violence. In fact though, the author is an American journalist who has aligned himself with the victims of genocide, portraying himself as a medium through which knowledge of genocide may be transmitted to willing readers. The title not only hails an outsider reader, but also directly identifies this reader as a significant participant in the narrative the text will provide about the hundreds of thousands of people killed in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This focus on the reader becomes problematic when, in its preoccupation with orienting an international humanitarian reader, the book decontextualizes events such as the ones surrounding its title.

As it turns out, the title originates from a letter written by a group of Tutsi Adventist pastors to a Hutu pastor who was the head of the Adventist church in

Mugonero. The letter asked Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana to intercede to prevent his fellow pastors and their families from being killed in a Hutu raid on the church, which Pastor Ntakirutimana was later proven to have helped organize. The "We" of the title remains ambiguous until page forty-two where a translation of the complete letter appears, and by this time the implied dialectic between the victims of genocide and the humanitarian reader has been established. The immediate effect of the title is to catch the attention of an otherwise disconnected reader by way of a shocking direct address, but the original exchange was not meant to be between storytellers and international literary humanitarians. The title thus decontextualizes the original plea to a fellow Rwandan, marking the failure of Rwandans to exhibit a common humanity that it then calls on the reader to express by extending this plea beyond the space of the state to an international (and primarily American) readership.

This chapter analyzes the logic by which the "you" of the original address is transposed into the "You" that hails the reader. I consider the effects of translating the reality of situated events into representations that are primarily concerned with garnering the attention of an international, humanitarian readership. In the case of Gourevitch's book, the temporal incongruity of the title and the killing of which it warns exposes the text as contrived; it calls out to the reader in the present concerning a "Tomorrow" that has already passed and killings that have already taken place. Invoking a moment before these killings, it inserts the reader within a temporality that, if not entirely prelapsarian, allows one the space from which to imagine oneself responding to this information. That the killings have, in reality, already taken place absolves the reader from the guilt of not having intervened to prevent atrocity; it enables the reader to reason that if only this

warning were administered in real time to the proper recipients the killings may have been stopped. Furthermore, it allows the reader to look on innocently at the way in which not only Pastor Ntakirutimana in this particular case, but also Hutus in Rwanda more broadly, failed to intercede to prevent the killing of Tutsis and actively participated in their decimation.[43]

In addition to Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You*, I also read Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*.[44] Works of nonfiction, semi-fiction, and fiction, respectively, each demonstrates how the politics of human rights shape the narrator-reader relationship and how this reflects national-international power dynamics. This chapter is thus concerned with the intersection of several factors: that between text and reader, fiction and nonfiction, and state and international communities. It is at this nexus that each of the texts I analyze attempts to express the suffering related to historically and politically situated events: genocide in Rwanda, apartheid violence and its post-apartheid aftermath in South Africa, and an industrial disaster similar to the 1984 Bhopal gas leak and subsequent toxic contamination that killed – and is still killing – thousands.[45] In this chapter I am particularly attentive to the way that each of these works configures its relationship to the reader. Each provides an opportunity to comment on conventions of literary humanitarianism, which operate according to the conviction that one may engage in a humanitarian act by reading, and thereby witnessing, stories of trauma and suffering. Literary humanitarianism approaches literature as testimony, the narrator as one who testifies, and the reader as a witness to testimony. The way these

subjects relate to each other in the literature within which they appear reflects power dynamics between the state and the international community.

Whereas in chapter one I critique the way human rights discourse equates narrative voice with agency, requiring individuals to perform a particular subjectivity in order to access the right to have rights, in this chapter I move from narrator as testifier to reader as witness. While chapter one discusses how a humanist conception of narrative voice, and its relationship to subjectivity and the right to have rights, excludes the subaltern from the rights infrastructure and reinforces the agency of those who endeavor to speak for them, this chapter questions the function that literary humanitarianism institutes for the reader. I analyze Gourevitch's and Krog's texts as examples of literary humanitarianism that present political violence as unspeakable trauma and attempt to overcome it though a testifier-witness dialectic between narrator and reader. I show how this treatment of political violence as trauma dislocates suffering from complex histories and politically and economically situated conflicts.[46] Then, reading *Animal's People* for its critique of the type of literary humanitarianism I identify in the first two texts, I build on my argument that the testimonial narrative structure is limiting and that a posthumanist approach to narrative offers an effective way to rethink the portrayal of political violence as trauma. The posthumanist approach that I identify in *Animal's People* not only decenters the human in conceptualizations of the world but also disrupts narratives of development that are grounded in humanist ideas about the formation of a 'civilized' subject. This posthumanist perspective is critical of the human rights discourse that often frames political violence, because within that framework difference (and often subalternity) undermines an individual's humanity and forecloses the right to have rights.

Each of the three texts in my analysis encapsulates a story within a metanarrative that illuminates the way stories are constructed according to the political circumstances in which they are told and who might be listening. They each not only attempt to cultivate a particular relationship to the reader but also present models of reading within their narratives. Paying particular attention to tropes of the senses (particularly seeing and hearing), I interrogate Gourevitch's and Krog's attempts to translate suffering via sensory descriptions that are intended to overcome what they each perceive to be a crisis of the imagination. I analyze how Sinha problematizes this exchange with the reader by mixing the metaphors of seeing and hearing. Whereas *We Wish to Inform You* and *Country* call on the reader to bear witness to testimonies of violence and trauma, *Animal's People* complicates attempts to manage violence in terms of trauma and to convert the corporeal experience of trauma into story. The first two texts critique how people witness trauma, encouraging them to improve as witnesses but maintaining the testifier-witness dialectic as a way to manage complex political histories; the third challenges literary humanitarianism and demonstrates the utility of a posthumanist orientation.

Imagining in Nonfiction: A Journalist's Guide through the Rwandan Genocide

In its depiction of the genocide in Rwanda, *We Wish to Inform You* is representative of a growing body of literature that seeks to address politically situated events as human rights concerns by representing life within such contexts as trauma to a reader-as-witness. Orienting its narrative about the genocide in Rwanda around a humanitarian reader, *We*

Wish to Inform You broadly surveys the political climate, details victims' stories, and attempts to dissect the psychology that supports genocide. Gourevitch depicts his travels throughout Rwanda and its surrounding countries from May 1995 to April 1998, relaying his encounters with both victims and perpetrators, his experiences visiting prisons, refugee camps, and former killing fields, and his musings on trauma, storytelling, and a series of existential questions.

While the text sharply criticizes the international community for failing to intercede quickly enough to stop the violence in Rwanda and for mishandling the situation in refugee camps thereafter, in its structure it undermines what might otherwise be a powerful political critique. The narrative suggests that by properly witnessing testimony, the reader might overcome the metaphysical crisis that genocide poses for universal humanism. It subsumes all of the historical, economic, and political information it provides within a human rights framework so as to conceptualize genocide for its reader. A careful reading will show that Gourevitch's discussion of the way economic instability transformed into 'ethnic' rivalry between Tutsis and Hutus and his depiction of the struggle for sovereignty between the Rwandan state and the UN is ultimately eclipsed by his portrayal of genocide as a crisis of the human imagination. Because the text reproduces an inequitable relationship between its Rwandan subjects and its primarily US readership that represents genocide in terms of its effect on its privileged reader, it really confronts the genocide in Rwanda only insofar as it endeavors to explain how genocide fits into its literary humanitarian reader's understanding of the world. Such a focus on a privileged, international reader reinforces the fantasy of the 'global citizen' as a human

rights advocate and the victimized subject as one whose suffering is endemic, but can supposedly be overcome through a relationship with a humanitarian reader.

At the outset, Gourevitch informs the reader "this is a book about how people imagine themselves and one another – a book about how we imagine our world" (6). In this statement he incorporates the reader into an indistinct "we" and embraces a postmodern conception of reality as that which is continually defined through the convergence of an infinite number of cognitive perceptions. He continues his discussion of imagining the world to offer a shorthand way of explaining genocide in Rwanda: "The government, and an astounding number of its subjects, imagined that by exterminating the Tutsi people they could make the world a better place, and the mass killing had followed" (6). Gourevitch invokes the idea that power lies in the ability to cultivate and control perception. He connects the power of imagining to storytelling, reflecting, "to a very large extent power consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality" (48). *We Wish to Inform You* is thus about confronting the way that a national government and a significant portion of its citizenry imagined the Rwandan state as a space from which Tutsis should be exterminated.

Faced with the prospect of incorporating genocide into his and his reader's reality, Gourevitch interprets genocide as a crisis of imagination that forces his reader to confront ugly things about the nature of man. He describes those in power in Rwanda as having inappropriately imagined their nation-state,[47] and he constructs a textual space in which he and his reader might imagine their own response to genocide. Acknowledging that the international community, represented by the UN and the US government, did not react sufficiently to revoke the sovereignty of what he depicts as a dysfunctional state,

Gourevitch stages *We Wish to Inform You* as an opportunity to restore a healthy function for imagination via an alliance between individual Rwandan storytellers and a collection of international readers. Presenting the text as Rwandan storytellers' articulation of events, Gourevitch settles in as a spectator and invites his reader to join him in this role. He offers a closer look at the genocide by presenting first hand accounts and physical descriptions so his reader might imagine and bear witness to mass killing and thereby align with Rwandan storytellers to reclaim imagination and incorporate genocide into a shared, internationally oriented reality.

Though the narrative within which Gourevitch embeds his critique of humanitarianism actually repeats the way that humanitarianism dislocates violence and suffering from its sources, it is useful to distinguish some of the valuable points he does make. He accurately points out that the genocide "remained, as it had always been, a political crisis, but the so-called international community preferred to treat it as a humanitarian crisis, as if the woe had appeared without any human rhyme or reason, like a flood or an earthquake" (167). In Rwanda in 1994, under the guise of humanitarian rhetoric, politically situated subjects became part of a struggle between the state and the international community, and the international humanitarian treatment of these subjects primarily as bodies in need exacerbated the political crisis within Rwanda. Regarding the mass killing as an aberration, the humanitarian response to the genocide sought to rescue suffering bodies while maintaining the appearance of political neutrality. In other words, the international community attempted to address genocide in Rwanda outside of the juridico-political structure as an inexplicable eruption of chaos that humanitarianism might remedy. As Gourevitch recalls, once the humanitarian campaign began, "[t]he

whole world was there to save the Africans from their sad, confusing, ugly story… [carrying out] the largest, most rapid, and most expensive deployment by the international humanitarian-aid industry in the twentieth century" (165). Gourevitch points out that this incredible amount of energy and resources "effectively made them [the international community] accessories to the Hutu Power syndicate" (166), because the refugee camps sheltered many of the leading perpetrators of the genocide.

Gourevitch recognizes the way humanitarianism attempts to separate rights from national citizenship and depoliticize conflicts by treating people simply as bodies in need. Indeed, humanitarianism tries to transcend struggles between competing sovereignties by imagining a post-national world and invoking a universal human. As Wendy Brown recognizes, humanitarian activism "presents itself as something of an antipolitics" (453) and "casts subjects as yearning to be free of politics" (456), but "there is no such thing as *mere* reduction of suffering or protection from abuse – the nature of the reduction or protection is itself productive of political subjects and political possibilities" (460). Treating the victims of the genocide in Rwanda as bodies "yearning to be free of politics" diverted attention from the way Rwanda's history of colonization under Germany and then Belgium led to political factions in the postcolonial state, and World Bank and IMF policies promoting structural adjustment intensified economic turmoil and allowed corrupt leaders to manufacture 'ethnic' tensions in order to wield power. Gourevitch acknowledges that attempts to bypass this complex history and neutralize the resulting socioeconomic and political struggles rather than resolve them, exacerbated the political crisis in Rwanda. He censures the United Nations, and the US government in particular, for allowing the genocide to occur and even exacerbating violence against Tutsis through

its administration of refugee camps that sheltered the Hutu leadership amongst Tutsi inhabitants.

However, while Gourevitch criticizes the UN and the US government, he qualifies his condemnation with extended discussions about the difficulty of incorporating a corrupt way of imagining the world into his and his reader's reality. In the sentence following his shorthand explanation that the predominant way of imagining the world in Rwanda led to mass killing (6), Gourevitch abruptly shifts his focus remarking, "All at once, as it seemed, something we could have only imagined was upon us – and we could still only imagine it. This is what fascinates me most in existence: the peculiar necessity of imagining what is, in fact, real" (7). This hasty transition from "they" (as in those who imagined "*they* could make the world a better place" [6; emphasis added] by killing Tutsis) to a "we" who is suddenly faced with comprehending such a way of imagining the world sets those who killed Tutsis apart as deviant Others who are unlike "us." What is more, this is a vague "we" that shifts its meaning. It seems at first to refer to all those who were victimized by or opposed to the way the Rwandan "government, and an astounding number of its subjects" (6) imagined the world, but it is then amended to describe those who can "still only imagine" (7) the reality to which this led. This "we" seems then to refer to those who did not experience the genocide from within but are now faced with the prospect of incorporating it into their reality. As an exercise in "imagining what is, in fact, real" (7), the text considers the genocide from the position of a spectator, reinforcing the boundary between "us" and "them."

Even as Gourevitch provides historical facts about the history of colonialism in Rwanda and the way the postcolonial development policies of the World Bank and IMF

contributed to the circumstances in which the genocide took place, he still upholds the moral superiority of the international community. Explaining how the economic instability brought about by a history of German and Belgian colonialism was worsened by World Bank and IMF policies promoting structural adjustment, Gourevitch acknowledges that these economic tensions were manipulated by corrupt leaders and solidified as an 'ethnic' rivalry between Tutsis and Hutus.[48] But, he then undermines this discussion by citing international human rights law in his evaluation of the Rwandan state and insinuating that the genocide, rather than resulting from systemic problems, was an aberration of this particular state that the international community could have prevented if it had properly enforced human rights law. According to Gourevitch's narrative, Rwanda was a failed state on the eve of the genocide, and the international community was its only hope for preventing genocide, but this community did not properly assert its political sovereignty and enforce human rights law. Reading the genocide as a failure of the state and citing "the Convention of 1948" (153),[49] Gourevitch suggests that the Rwandan state failed to uphold the contract between the state and its people that the UDHR calls for and the UN and its most powerful state-members did not adequately respond to this breach.

Interrogating the Rwandan state is an undercurrent that runs throughout *We Wish to Inform You.* Using the stories he collects as evidence, Gourevitch characterizes Rwanda during the genocide as a failed state that no longer served Rwanda as a whole but rather allowed for a corrupt state dominated by Hutu extremists. For example, having detailed several accounts of the way that the genocide was carried out by neighbors killing neighbors, Gourevitch concludes the vignette describing pastor Ntakirutimana's involvement in the murders of the people of his church and his fellow pastors by

emphasizing the words of his translator, Arcene: "The people who did this… didn't understand the idea of country. What is country? What is a human being? They had no understanding" (43). The implication here is that not only did people who murdered their countrymen not properly perform their citizenship in the state, but also that notions of country and of the human being have become so unstable that genocide has emerged as a symptom of their deterioration. Gourevitch's reliance on this explanation underscores the way that tensions between the state and international community – and the way that human rights discourse is deployed to negotiate these tensions – structure understandings of the genocide in Rwanda.

We Wish to Inform You situates its readership in a position from which to perform the role of peacekeeper and savior that it suggests the international community failed at in 1994. In an effort to facilitate an international response to genocide from within a textual space, Gourevitch provides his primarily US readership with a sensory experience and attempts to train this reader to be a better witness to trauma (which also implicitly disassociates the reader from any of the causes of the trauma). Similar to the way that the title functions, the structure of the text frames the genocide as something from which the reader is removed and then, revealing vivid representations of the genocide, it encourages the reader to imagine him or herself as an innocent witness whose purpose it is to restore the humanist ideals that such violence threatens. Acknowledging the anxiety that surrounds his discussion of genocide, Gourevitch writes:

> I presume that you are reading this because you desire a closer look, and that you, too, are properly disturbed by your curiosity. Perhaps, in examining this extremity with me, you hope for some understanding, some insight, some flicker of self-knowledge – a moral, or a lesson… I don't discount the possibility, but when it comes to genocide, you already know right from wrong. The best reason I have

> come up with for looking closely into Rwanda's stories is that ignoring them makes me even more uncomfortable about existence and my place in it (19).

Characterizing his readers as having the proper balance of curiosity and apprehension, Gourevitch establishes a kinship with them, thus reassuring the reader that it is acceptable to want "a closer look" (19). Yet, he insists that "examining this extremity" with him will probably not provide "understanding," "insight," or "self-knowledge" that will teach a "moral, or a lesson," because "you already know right from wrong" (19). He at once classifies the genocide as a dangerous yet distant occurrence to be studied and suggests that learning anything new from this activity is not likely since his reader is already equipped to navigate "right from wrong." The "desire [for] a closer look" is then really about tending to this "extremity" so as to feel less "uncomfortable" that it makes up part of the body of man (19). This focus on the metaphysical impact of genocide amongst those supposed outsiders who seek to get "a closer look" (19) reveals a preoccupation with salvaging the humanist contract, which genocide undermines but current human rights law promises for citizens of the state and subjects of the international community.

Portraying the genocide as something that is removed from his reader's reality, Gourevitch presents himself as his reader's eyes and ears on the ground where the killings occurred and suggests that through this textual exchange both he and his reader might relieve the discomfort that incorporating genocide into their reality causes. Likening his own journey through Rwanda to the reader's engagement with the text, he acts as a guide through the process of confronting the mass killing. He encourages his reader to take a closer look with him as he describes his own apprehension upon encountering dead bodies for the first time at Nyarubuye: "I had never been among the dead before. What to do? Look? Yes. I wanted to see them, I suppose; I had come to see

them" (16). Gourevitch steers the reader through the decision to look at the dead and portrays spectatorship as a meaningful act. Acknowledging his own desire to see the dead and admitting that looking at them will fulfill the purpose of his trip to Nyarubuye, he grants the reader permission to look as well. He then expresses the act of looking at the dead as a momentous event that serves a useful function, commenting, "Those dead Rwandans will be with me forever, I expect. That was why I had felt compelled to come to Nyarubuye: to be stuck with them – not with their experience, but with the experience of looking at them" (16). Distinguishing between their experience and the experience of looking at them, Gourevitch emphasizes the importance of the latter, suggesting that being "stuck with[…] the experience of looking at them" has changed him. The implication is that looking is a responsibility that he willingly takes on and that in doing so he is transformed into a witness who may fulfill a purpose.

The act of witnessing, rather than experiencing, positions Gourevitch and his reader outside of the trauma of the killing in a position to observe, study, and conceptualize. This anthropological approach of the outsider looking in renders the witness capable of overcoming trauma, purportedly by intellectualizing it in a way that the victim, who may not be able to articulate trauma from within, is unable to do. Thus the text is primarily concerned with orienting the reader as a witness, and ultimately it remains "stuck with[…] the experience of looking" (16) unable to move beyond this into action. This becomes clear as Gourevitch remarks, "I couldn't settle on any meaningful response: revulsion, alarm, sorrow, grief, shame, incomprehension, sure, but nothing truly meaningful. I just looked, and I took photographs, because I wondered whether I could really see what I was seeing while I saw it, and I wanted also an excuse to look a

bit more closely" (19). Encouraging the notion that genocide is something to get a look at, and take pictures of so as to be able to observe, verify, and study it in more detail, Gourevitch admits that he is unable to respond in a productive way. In the text, looking leads to more looking, which develops into collecting. Thus Gourevitch elucidates, "I traveled around the country collecting accounts of the killing" (23). He embeds these accounts within his narrative of witnessing, presenting them as testimony.

One of the more prominently featured personal accounts of Rwandan history and the genocide that *We Wish to Inform You* presents is Odette Nyiramilimo's, a Tutsi doctor whom Gourevitch interviews. He includes a lengthy narrative account of the life story Odette tells, which she suggests coincides with the history of the genocide. While Gourevitch acknowledges, "Odette spoke as a genocide survivor to a foreign correspondent" (71), he does not simply relay what she communicates, but rather he editorializes her story within the larger framework of his narrative in order to discuss his own metaphysical concerns. Commenting on the moments Odette chooses to emphasize in her story, Gourevitch remarks, "This is how Rwandan Tutsis count the years of their lives: in a hopscotch fashion – 'fifty-nine, 'sixty, 'sixty-one, 'sixty-three, and so on, through 'ninety-four – sometimes skipping several years when they knew no terror, sometimes slowing down to name the months and the days" (64).[50] Odette recalls the history that culminated in genocide, explaining how violent political struggles between Tutsis and Hutus (and their international sponsors) affected her and her family from the time of the 1959 revolution when she was three years old through the 1994 genocide. But, rather than accepting that Odette is attempting to report her experience of political

crises to a foreign correspondent and his readership, Gourevitch subsumes her story within his own narrative agenda.

More specifically, as Gourevitch interprets Odette's narrative style, he attempts to extract meaning from her story so as to inform his reader's understanding of memory and comment on its relationship to the crisis of imagination with which he is concerned. He thus pontificates, "She was keeping everything that was not about Hutu and Tutsi to herself" (70), because, "if others have so often made your life their business[...] then perhaps you will want to guard the memory of those times when you were freer to imagine yourself as the only times that are truly and inviolably your own" (71). First of all, if the stories that Gourevitch is able to access and share with the reader are structured by the way that others have imagined the victims and not how they have imagined themselves, this calls into question the viability of such an exchange between storyteller as testifier and reader as witness. What is more though, Gourevitch discusses Odette's story to the extent that it allows him to contemplate the crisis of imagination that genocide poses for him and his privileged reader. He approaches the personal history that Odette shares as an aesthetic articulation of her psychology, explicating, "Her theme was the threat of annihilation, and the moments of reprieve in her story – the fond memories, funny anecdotes, sparks of wit – came, if at all, in quick beats, like punctuation marks" (71). Gourevitch reduces Odette's explanation of a complicated political history to an abstract "theme" and condescendingly analogizes the sequence of challenges and pleasures in her story to variations in grammar and syntax.

Rendering Odette an abstraction, Gourevitch reads her symbolically so as to analyze how memory functions not simply for her but also by extension for all of

humanity.[51] In fact, in the midst of narrating Odette's account, Gourevitch discusses his own parents' and grandparents' memories as refugees from Nazism, revealing how *We Wish to Inform You* presents genocide in Rwanda through the lens of an entirely different sociopolitical crisis. This not only undermines the specificity of the genocide in Rwanda, but also diminishes the history Odette attempts to communicate. Rather than focusing on the political discussion in which Odette is attempting to engage a foreign correspondent and his readership, the text presents personal stories as a way to confront and potentially resolve anxiety about incorporating genocide in Rwanda (which it implies is interchangeable with the holocaust) into an international humanitarian reader's understanding of the world.

Similar to the way in which *We Wish to Inform You* undermines its own critique of humanitarian intervention in Rwanda by co-opting Odette's and others' stories within a narrative structure that positions its readers as literary humanitarians, *Country* – the next text I analyze –presents testimony from the TRC hearings within a narrative framework in which its narrator guides the reader through a textual encounter with trauma. In *Country* the narrator shares her struggle to deal with the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of bearing witness to tremendous suffering. By identifying the similarities between Gourevitch's work of nonfiction and Krog's fictionalized account of historical facts, I will demonstrate how human rights discourse operates similarly across nonfiction and fictionalized narratives.

Like Gourevitch, Krog is also a journalist; but, rather than publishing a purely nonfiction text, Krog, who is additionally an established Afrikaans poet,[52] features actual testimony from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in South Africa within a fictionalized frame narrative. *Country* narrates the hearings in a rough chronology, illustrating how "[o]ne sorrow-filled room flows into another[...] but the language, the detail, the individual tone... it stays" (Krog 51). It depicts the different people involved, from the TRC commissioners and their staffs to those who testify (victims in the first set of hearings and perpetrators in the second set) to translators, journalists, and grief counselors, amongst others. Within the world of the TRC hearings that the text portrays, the narrator – a fictionalized version of Krog – tells her own story about being a witness to the hearings and how this impacts her as a journalist, a poet, a South African (and Afrikaner), a mother, a wife, and a daughter.

As it moves between nonfiction and fiction *Country* eludes easy categorization. The narrator is never explicitly named, but other characters occasionally address her as Antjie, and several iterations of the author's name appear within the text,[53] marking its first-person narrator's various professional and personal identities (Antjie, Antjie Krog, Antjie Samuel, and Antjie Somers) as well as the text's slippage between nonfiction and fiction.[54] To a certain extent the narrator shares Krog's experience of the hearings as a radio journalist for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), but Antjie is ultimately a fictional character. Additionally, the text sometimes includes testimonies verbatim but other times presents an amalgamation of different people's testimonies. It is

a mixture of actual and imagined legal testimony, poetry, prose, historiography, and literary and theoretical analysis that is focalized through a narrator whose identity continually shifts. The narrator's unstable identity not only reveals the text's preoccupation with securing its narrator's position within post-apartheid South Africa, but also how literary humanitarianism is often motivated by privileged subjects' compulsion to retain control and moral authority as they confront the atrocities committed within the power structures from which they benefit.

While *We Wish to Inform You* operates as nonfiction and *Country* maneuvers between nonfiction and fiction, both are concerned with making sense of political violence that challenges the way that a group of privileged people imagines their world. Both Gourevitch and Krog also define their positions in relation to political violence by way of their sensory experiences as witnesses of trauma. Similar to Gourevitch who says he will forever be "stuck with… the experience of looking" (16) at the dead bodies at Nyarubuye, Krog insists, by way of her fictional persona, her sensory experience of suffering will "haunt [her] for ever and ever" (57). Both chronicle political history in terms of trauma. *Country*, in particular, portrays a post-apartheid state in crisis as it attempts to recover from a traumatic history, and it operates according to the idea that one may gain control over trauma by translating and containing it within a repeatable story. Describing Antjie's sensory experience as a witness both prior to and during the TRC hearings, *Country* draws the reader in as a witness by extension and portrays Antjie as a model for the reader. Like the narrator though, the identity of the text's intended reader also shifts. As I will show in the next several pages, the relationship that the text imagines between its fragmented narrator and its inconsistent narratee exemplifies the problematic

dialectic through which literary humanitarianism attempts to overcome conflict between domestic factions as well as friction between the state and the international community by articulating national and international political conflicts as personal trauma.

Whereas *Wish to Inform You* focuses on the experience of looking to incorporate the reader as a witness by proxy, *Country* emphasizes sound to narrate a story of violence, trauma, and recovery and expand a community of witnesses to reinforce the establishment of a new South Africa. It is after all part of Antjie's job to sift through the "web of infinite sorrow" (Krog 45) to which she is exposed at the TRC hearings and select the "perfect sound bite" (45) to broadcast. In the text this attention to sound becomes a metaphor for the power that Antjie suggests the TRC hearings have to forge a new South Africa. The opening pages of *Country* are set at a public hearing to collect input on drafting legislation to establish a Truth Commission. The hearing begins with the reading of a list of 120 names of people who died in police custody, and the text emphasizes the aural effect of this litany, commenting, "name upon name upon name. They fall like chimes into the silence" (3). These names punctuate the silence of the room accentuating the extent to which people are "stunned by this magnitude of death that is but a bare beginning" (3). But, moments later "[s]uddenly another kind of noise fills the hall" (4). It is Eugene Terre'Blanche, founder of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB; the party of the Afrikaner Resistance Movement), who has come to the meeting to announce the conditions under which the AWB will cooperate with the government. Antjie describes this man, observing, "he is a master of acoustics. He drenches us with sound – every tremor, boom, reverberating corner of that space, under his command" (4). The text depicts his power through his control of the sound in the room; Antjie suggests

he has a physical impact on those at the hearing, illustrating the way he "drenches us with sound" (4). The sound that he evokes weighs on those in the room, drowning out the names of those who have died and filling the room instead with booming tremors that evoke the tyranny of apartheid-era governance.

The text juxtaposes the power evident in Terre'Blanche's command of sound to the power that Antjie identifies in Nomonde Calata's testimony at the TRC hearings. Calata is the wife of the deceased Fort Calata, one of the Cradock Four who disappeared after being stopped at a road block by South African security forces in 1985, and an activist in her own right.[55] Antjie focuses on the sound of Calata crying, suggesting that it renders the devastation of apartheid-era violence undeniable but that its potential power is dependent on the ability of those who witness it to find words for it:

> that sound… it will haunt me for ever and ever[…] to witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language… was to realize that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language. And to get that memory, to fix it in words, to capture it with the precise image, is to be present at the birth of language itself. But more practically, this particular memory at last captured in words can no longer haunt you, push you around, bewilder you, because you have taken control of it[…] So maybe this is what the commission is all about – finding words for that cry of Nomonde Calata (57).

The text insinuates that Calata's cry is a poignant expression of South Africa's violent past that requires translation into words. It suggests that Calata, along with other victims of apartheid-era violence, is unable to fully articulate her suffering and it is therefore up to the witnesses to whom she testifies to find a way to represent it. The implication is that if the testifier expresses suffering and the witness absorbs it and articulates it then together they may gain control of a traumatic national past and through this alliance reconcile a previously divided country. For Antjie, bearing witness to the sound of Calata's cry and working "to fix it in words" (57) is a way for her to regain control and

establish a valuable position in the new South Africa. *Country* extends what Antjie perceives to be the project of the TRC by expanding the community of witnesses through its readership and endeavoring to find words for Calata's cry.

One of the assumptions that frames the TRC hearings is that victims of political violence, like Calata, contain a toxic past in their bodies,[56] and by communicating their pain to a community of witnesses, they may (at least partially) release trauma from their bodies, and thus from the body of the nation. Krog identifies instances of trauma in the testimony from the TRC hearings, and she seeks to represent this perceived trauma by situating it within a larger narrative that portrays non-linguistic communication – like Calata's cry – as an indication of trauma. By setting the trauma in question down in textual form, Krog assumes the role of translator, articulating what the individual testifier supposedly cannot to the reader-witness. *Country* attempts to augment what it perceives to be the work of the TRC hearings by expanding the community of witnesses and establishing a more extensive narrative space from which to manage the past as trauma. Antjie expresses what it is about the TRC hearings that the text endeavors to replicate, reflecting, "For me, the Truth Commission microphone with its little red light was the ultimate symbol of the whole process: here the marginalized voice speaks to the public ear; the unspeakable is spoken – and translated; the personal story brought from the innermost depths of the individual binds us anew to the collective" (311). The suggestion here is that acting as a witness to testimony provides a dialectic space within which to conceptualize and manage trauma. *Country* imagines this dialectic establishing a new national space, implying that the relationship between testifier and witness is the foundation of a new South Africa.

In her analysis of *Country*, Ashleigh Harris argues that Krog fails to properly communicate trauma and violates the testimonial process by effacing those who testified at the hearings within a narrative that is primarily concerned with defining her own subjectivity.[57] Faulting Krog for relying on a postmodern definition of truth to excuse her lack of citation, Harris suggests Krog violates the ethical code that the testimonial process demands of a secondary narrative. Harris's discussion of *Country* is useful insofar as it clearly outlines the ideal of testimony toward which *Country* strives; she describes testifying at the TRC hearings as "a psychological descarification process in which the body is relieved of the duty to archive the traumatic past; a duty that is now passed onto the testimony and, more broadly, onto the TRC itself" (Harris 31). However, Harris takes issue with the *way* that *Country* presents a traumatic past; she does not question this ideal of testimony or the effects of understanding a history of political violence as trauma. While Harris calls for poetic accountability and suggests *Country* does not properly bear witness to historical trauma,[58] I contend that the depiction of apartheid-era violence as trauma is problematic because it renders a politically complicated history unspeakable and then focuses on articulating the suffering this trauma has caused rather than accounting for and dealing with the sources of trauma.

While Harris argues that as *Country* subsumes others' voices within Krog's voice it "is in danger of effacing, rather than archiving, the traumatic past" (51), I question the very project of archiving the past as trauma. Certainly Harris rightly points out that Krog's preoccupation with establishing her voice verges on effacing those whose testimony she appropriates, but this is indicative of a larger issue that has to do with representing political violence as trauma and relying on a testifier-witness dialectic to

relieve the nation of this trauma. Casting a complicated political history as trauma and setting out to archive it at once deems the sources of this history unrespresentable and insinuates that it can be compartmentalized and accessed as part of the past via testimonial narratives. This relegates the political conflict to the past without resolving it, and it suggests that political conflict can be fully addressed metaphorically. It is this assumption that allows political violence to be understood in terms of trauma and necessitates a secondary narrative to represent trauma that is otherwise inexpressible.

Certainly trauma is a part of the history of South Africa, but *Country* represents South Africa's entire history of apartheid as trauma. My point is that the text's postmodern theorization of truth that critics, including Harris, criticize along with its narrative fragmentation and the production of different editions for national and international readerships are symptomatic of a larger problematic. By depicting the moment of interaction between testifier and witness as the "birth of this country's language" (Krog 42), *Country* connects the foundation of a new South Africa to a human rights inflected narrative, and it positions Krog and her reader-witness as the agents upon whom the realization of a new South Africa is dependent. In short, the text attempts to establish a national narrative within which violent political conflict is conceptualized in terms of trauma and then overcome through the dialectic between a narrator-testifier and reader-witness. It is this dynamic with which I take issue, because attempts to understand political violence as trauma and overcome it through a testifier witness dialectic defer structural changes that might prevent further suffering, and they detract attention from the political and economic realities that define power struggles both within the state and between the state and the international community. The logic of human rights that

perceives political violence as trauma and relies on testimony to overcome it also poses rights against wrongs in a binary that evaluates political crises in direct proportion to the perceived humanity (read innocence) of victims and inhumanity of perpetrators. A concern with the subjectivity of the victims and perpetrators of suffering overshadows material reality and structural problems as it requires individuals to perform a particular subjectivity in order to either demonstrate their rights against others' wrongs or, as in the case of the perpetrators who testified at the TRC hearings, admit their wrongs and appeal for amnesty.

Country imagines that Antjie's well-being and the future of the new South Africa hinge on the representation of trauma, but the paradox of representation that Antjie faces exposes the narrowness of this view. As Antjie struggles to fulfill her role as a witness, she questions the ethics of representing others' personal trauma and finds it difficult to live with the trauma she has supposedly internalized. Referring to the paradox of narrating the testimony she has heard, she claims, "If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don't, I die" (66). At the risk of exploitation and betrayal she determines she must write this narrative of the testimonies at the TRC hearings or the trauma will destroy her. The text implies that such a defeat would indicate failure not simply for Antjie personally but also for the nation, and *Country* is concerned with preventing the premature death of a new, inclusive, post-apartheid South Africa. Narrating the history of apartheid-era South Africa as a series of human traumas, the text attempts to manage contradictory loyalties toward various factions within the state and the international community, but Antjie's concern about betraying those whose suffering she represents, along with the text's

continual references to betrayal,[59] exposes the paradoxical situation that arises from addressing political history as trauma.

The anxiety about betrayal that Antjie experiences manifests in the narrative in her inconsistent identity,[60] which is an effect of conceptualizing political violence in terms of trauma and requiring individuals to identify themselves in relation to this trauma. The text represents a national political conflict as a personal crisis in the shifting identity of both its narrator and narratee. If the text is ultimately an attempt to speak the South African nation, it is useful to analyze the fragmented narrator it imagines speaking the nation and the alternating narratee to whom it represents South African history as trauma. Scholars have commented on the inconsistent identity of both,[61] but I suggest this fragmentation is a sign of the inadequacy of conceptualizing political violence as trauma. By incorporating testimony from the TRC hearings into a storyline in which its narrator internalizes the national crisis that post-apartheid governance poses, *Country* theorizes political conflict in terms of its narrator's personal trauma and expresses it as narrative fragmentation. As it alternates between Krog's names, the text reveals its narrator's fragmented identity, which it relates to a crisis of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Krog's married name, and the name she uses as a journalist for the SABC, is Antjie Samuel while her poetry written in Afrikaans is published under the name Krog.[62] Shifting between these names in the text, the narrator invokes the various identities that she is attempting to negotiate in order to determine her own post-apartheid persona.[63] As Antjie's identity shifts as her name appears in its different iterations, her role as a narrator fluctuates as well so that the text performs what Moss calls a "micro-Truth Commission"

(92) that is focalized through its Afrikaaner narrator's preoccupation with securing her own place in a post-apartheid nation.

Not only does *Country* shuttle between Krog's different names in an attempt to negotiate a position for her within the new South Africa, these changing names coincide with the text's slippage between nonfiction and fiction, signaling an attempt to use literature to gain control in an unstable political reality. Krog turns to literature as a space within which to imagine the otherwise improbable work of developing an inclusive national community after decades of institutionalized racism and pervasive structural violence. The text manipulates the boundaries of fiction because it is otherwise unable to reconcile the various political factions that Krog's fragmented identity represents. As it darts between nonfiction and fiction it exposes the ambiguity that results from treating political violence as trauma and attempting to resolve political conflict metaphorically. The text thus exhibits the failure of both nonfiction journalistic narratives and fiction to address political violence by representing the suffering it causes within a testifier-witness dialectic. My point here is not that *Country* fails to fulfill the potential literature has to enhance an idealized testimonial process or that literature is an inadequate space to address political violence. Rather, I mean to say that narrating political violence as trauma, as both *We Wish to Inform You* and *Country* do, depends on representations of suffering that depoliticize violence and attempt to neutralize it so as to fit it into the dominant imagination of the world rather than challenge the unequal power relations that produce suffering.

In addition to her narrator's fragmented identity and the corresponding movement between nonfiction and fiction, *Krog's* preoccupation with managing different loyalties is

further evidenced by the publication of two different editions: first, a South African edition (*Country of My Skull*) and second, an international edition (which, as previously noted, this chapter refers to as *Country*), published in the US with the subtitle "*Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*." Critics have remarked on the way that the second edition omits fictionalized details about the extramarital affair that the text's main character has in the first edition and on the additional introduction, textual notes, glossaries, character lists, and epilogue that appear in the internationally published book. Moss observes, "The second edition, with its extensive paratextual additions and editorial excisions, figures more as a documentary than the original edition" (89). The omitted fictionalized material further blurs the distinction between Krog and her narrativized, fictional persona, and the added historical and political explanations are presented as a comprehensive introduction to the struggle over apartheid. *Country* provides a new introduction by an American journalist; a lengthy epilogue; a section titled "Cast of Characters" that provides brief biographies; and an index (a textual element not usually included alongside a literary narrative). Through these elements it attempts to educate the international reader so that this reader may act as a witness to national trauma and recovery and, in doing so, facilitate the acceptance of the re-imagined South African nation-state into the international community.

To some extent *Country*'s portrayal of Winnie Mandela as a shape shifter who presents herself differently to national and international audiences illustrates how Krog attempts to narrate the TRC hearings differently for national and international readerships. Similar to Winnie Mandela, who "Media experts say [is] like a chameleon, moving across boundaries in quite an extraordinary way" (Krog 320), *Country* deploys

narrative to move across boundaries: between nonfiction and fiction, genres (poetry, prose, historiography, and memoir), and various identities (Antjie, Antjie Krog, Antjie Samuel, and Antjie Somers). Further discussing Winnie Mandela, *Country* emphasizes the words of an American journalist who says to Antjie, "she's not arriving for you, she's arriving for the Afro-American audience. She's already given more than ten hours of interview time to us. Her constituency is out there" (321). This speculation about Winnie Mandela's constituency calls to mind questions about *Country*'s own readership and whether this international edition reinforces the unquestioned agency of its international readership within the human rights movement.

Krog both transgresses textual and identity categories and publishes different editions in an effort to appeal to various constituencies within and across national and international boundaries. More than simply exhibiting a postmodern inclination to destabilize truth as critics have suggested,[64] the way that the text shuttles between various identities for its narrator and narratee and contextualizes trauma differently for national and international audiences exposes friction between the state, international networks of governance, those who influence the circulation of multinational capital, and competing ethical doctrines. *Country* imagines not only that a union between testifier and witness at the TRC hearings may establish a new national community but also that extending the community of witnesses to an international readership may validate the new South Africa as a secure state and viable partner within the international community. The alternation between national and international loyalties reveals the conflict between national and international sovereignty that defines the contemporary human rights discourse that *Country* engages. As the text attempts to express loyalty to conflicting national and

international sovereignties it focuses on articulating depoliticized, human suffering and archiving it via its reader-witnesses rather than disrupting power relations within the state and between the state and international community by accounting for and dealing with the politically situated sources of suffering.

While *Country* attempts to appeal to competing national and international factions, which results in both personal and textual fragmentation and an inconsistent, perhaps even unethical, postmodern representation of truth, *Animal's People* – the final text I will analyze – challenges the way that national and international sovereignties interact. *Animal's People* takes issue with a transnational company that refuses to recognize national authority and a state that compromises the well being of its people in order to serve its own financial interests. Furthermore, it problematizes the discourse of human rights that both *We Wish to Inform You* and *Country* deploy to negotiate these contradictory sovereignties.

The Fiction of Literary Humanitarianism: Beyond Metaphor "the Poor Remain"

Whereas both *We Wish to Inform You* and *Country* are written by journalists from their relatively privileged positions, *Animal's People* is its narrator Animal's response to a journalist's request for his story, and his critical tone challenges the integrity of this journalist's interest in him. I invoke Animal's objections to the journalist in his own story to problematize both Gourevitch's and Krog's texts. For instance, the way in which Animal questions the likelihood that the tapes onto which he records his story will be

accurately transcribed and properly understood by a reader problematizes the way in which *Country* relates translated testimonies recorded at the TRC hearings. Though *Animal's People* is a work of fiction, its setting – a fabricated city called Khaufpur (Khauf meaning terror and pur a suffix meaning city in Urdu) – is modeled after Bhopal where the effects of a massive industrial disaster are still being felt and where Sinha's efforts as an activist are focused. The narrator is part of the underclass of Khaufpur, and because of a spinal deformation that has resulted from the poisonous chemicals to which he is exposed, he walks on all fours and goes by the name Animal. Animal rejects the journalist's initial proposition for his story, refusing to provide a standard account of trauma and an appeal for human rights. But, he eventually decides to tell the story that makes up the novel in order to deliberate on his existence and decide whether or not to have an operation, made possible by humanitarian aid, to straighten his spine. As his narrative proceeds, he gradually cultivates a posthumanist perspective through which he denaturalizes many of the assumptions of human rights discourse.

Animal's People challenges textual engagements with political violence as trauma, and it exposes how such narratives employ the discourse of human rights as they sustain inequitable power dynamics. The novel has many layers: the frame narrative within which Animal speaks his story into a series of tapes is preceded by an editor's note, appended by a glossary, and expanded upon at the website www.khaufpur.com. The editor's note, itself part of the fictional frame narrative, refers to Animal not by his name but condescendingly as "a nineteen-year-old boy" as it guarantees the authenticity of his narrative, which it insists is provided in his words though they have admittedly been transcribed from tapes and translated from Hindi to English. The "Khaufpuri Glossary"

and the website that promises to provide further information on the fictional city offer to further contextualize a narrative that the tongue-in-cheek editor's note implies is supplied by a 'native informant.' Ironically, on the website, Animal voices his perturbation concerning the final publication of his story.[65] The novel's many paratextual layers comment on the way that narratives circulate within and across domestic and international spaces, reflecting struggles to manage conceptions of political conflicts and the way in which such conflicts are influenced by the movement of transnational capital.

In the opening pages of *Animal's People*, the narrator recalls the journalist who solicited his story for inclusion in a book. He greets him, "Salaam Jarnalis, it's me, Animal" (Sinha 3), and he speaks directly to the journalist for the space of a few pages before shifting his address to the journalist's readership. I read Animal's dialogue with this particular journalist as an intertextual address that puts him in conversation with the journalists in *We Wish to Inform You* and *Country*. Animal indicts the journalist he meets admonishing him: "You were like all the others, come to suck our stories from us, so strangers in far off countries can marvel there's so much pain in the world. Like vultures are you jarnaliss. Somewhere a bad thing happens, tears like rain in the wind, and look, here you come, drawn by the smell of blood. You have turned us Khaufpuris into storytellers, but always the same story" (5). Animal notices that journalists pursue a story that casts him and his fellow Khaufpuris as suffering, subaltern victims. His criticism of a publishing industry that surveys the carnage of political battlefields for narratives of suffering and reinforces an uneven power dynamic between a privileged reader and an unfortunate victim turned storyteller,[66] puts Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You* and Krog's *Country* into question. Both by journalists, these two texts tell a story of mass

suffering that is focalized through the narrator's experience as a witness to trauma. Both narrators ultimately tell the story of their own and their reader's existential crisis (brought on by a confrontation with mass suffering) and how they deal with it by assuming the role of witness and therein supposedly relieving victims of an otherwise debilitating trauma. The structure of the story in these texts, and the structure of the story that Animal criticizes, allows a privileged readership to contemplate suffering as evidence of a universal ethical crisis, rather than a situated political crisis, and it casts the reader-witness as a literary humanitarian.

Animal expresses frustration with journalists who plot him as a suffering body in need within the normative human rights story. He challenges the journalist, arguing, "many books have been written about this place, not one has changed anything for the better, how will yours be different? You will bleat like all the rest. You'll talk of *rights, law, justice*. Those words sound the same in my mouth as in yours but they don't mean the same" (3). The implication is that the many books that have been written about Khaufpur all tell the same human rights story citing "*rights, law,* [and] *justice*" to support an ethical argument against suffering. Perhaps these words have not made a difference because they do not correspond to particular political action, policy, or legislation. Furthermore, such words do not mean the same when Animal says them because as a subaltern subject he cannot speak of his own accord and is without the right to have rights. Within the human rights framework he is only allowed to speak "the same story" (5); he is unable to access the 'universal' tenets of "*rights, law,* [and] *justice*" without assimilating to the idea the journalist has of him and applying to him for humanitarian intervention. There is, however, yet another, more compelling reason these words mean

something different when Animal uses them: rather than endorsing them as solutions to politically situated violence, he attempts to articulate them from a posthumanist perspective.

The suggestion is that the book Animal narrates will tell a different kind of story; it will not provide the testimonial narrative that journalists offer when they discuss Khaufpur. Essentially, Animal is telling his story in an attempt to both express his outrage at a political situation and resolve a related personal, ethical quandary, but he insists that justice in Khaufpur should not be dependent on him narrating himself or other Khaufpuris as suffering victims. Having initially refused to tell the journalist a story within the parameters that it was sought, Animal has now decided he will tell his story in his own way, and he insists it will be a different sort of story. He acknowledges his first refusal, reflecting, "What's changed? Everything. As to what happened, well, there are many versions going round, every newspaper had a different story, not one knows the truth, but I'm not talking to this tape for truth or fifty rupees or Chunaram's fucking kebabs. I've a choice to make, let's say it's between heaven and hell, my problem is knowing which is which" (11). Animal specifically says he's not talking "for truth," meaning his goal is not to testify about the events that have occurred or the conditions in which he and his fellow Khaufpuris live. His intent is not to record a particular truth to prove his worth as a person and establish his right to have rights. Finding the ethical framework of human rights an ineffective way to navigate the situation within which he finds himself, he tells this story to explore other possibilities. At the end of the text, he reveals the dilemma that he faced when a letter arrived from the US informing him his surgery would be paid for. He remembers that he decided to tell his story in order to

determine if he should have the surgery or not, recalling, "I will tell this story, I thought and that way I'll find out what the end should be. I'll know what to do" (365). Unsure what an ethical code that is not constricted within a humanist framework might look like, he tells his story without knowing how it will end. Animal sets out to tell a story to which he does not know the ending in order to contemplate what should come next in a narrative that refuses a humanitarian rescue fantasy.

Once he has decided to tell his story, Animal spends some time contemplating the prospect of addressing the readership the journalist had assured him would find him interesting. Recalling the journalist's assertion that thousands would be able to see Animal through him, Animal balks, "I think of this awful idea. Your eyes full of eyes. Thousands staring at me through the holes in your head. Their curiosity feels like acid on my skin" (7). Animal is sickened by the thought of being the object of the kind of spectatorship in which Gourevitch and Krog enable their readership to engage. He does not want to be the object of the reader's sensory experience in order that this reader might be able to witness the traumatic effects of the chemical disaster in Khaufpur. Even speaking directly to this readership without the journalist's mediation, Animal senses, "What I say becomes a picture and the eyes settle on it like flies" (13). Animal finds it objectionable to create such a sensory experience for the reader and suggests that telling a story that appeals for human rights renders him and the Khaufpuris about whom he writes objects of decay. Creating a picture that draws readers "like flies" (13) does not allow him and his fellow Khaufpuris to be dynamic, multifaceted individuals whose existence transcends the disaster (and its mishandling) that they have endured.

Identifying the reader of Animal's narrative as an outsider who inhabits a radically different socioeconomic position, the text problematizes this relationship and details Animal's struggle to redefine its parameters. Animal draws attention to the absurd gap between himself and his readership, raging, "'What am I to tell these eyes?[...] What can I say that they will understand? Have these thousands of eyes slept even one night in a place like this? Do these eyes shit on railway tracks? When was the last time these eyes had nothing to eat? These cuntish eyes, what do they know of our lives?" (7–8). Animal tells his story after playing a prominent role in extended political protests that result in violent rioting and a second night of terror that reproduces the initial industrial disaster in Khaufpur. He tells his story and that of his people in order to make sense of these events and decide if he should have an operation he feels may change life as he knows it. However, he finds that the normative humanist framework within which the contemporary publishing industry packages his story joins him in a dialectic with a readership that does not understand even the most fundamental elements of his life.

He alludes to the chasm between the reader and himself, noting the difficulty of communicating his story across socioeconomic, linguistic, and spatial differences. At one point he muses, "You don't answer. I keep forgetting you do not hear me. The things I say, by the time they reach you they'll have been changed out of Hindi, made into Inglis et français pourquoi pas pareille quelques autres langues? For you they're just words written on a page. Never can you hear my voice, nor can I ever know what pictures you see" (21). More than just a disconnect between signifier and signified, Animal observes the instability of a narratee with whom he shares neither personal space, common experience, or language and whom he will most likely never meet or be able to

communicate with directly. Animal's anger at the socioeconomic gap between his readership and himself and his consideration of the possibility for miscommunication not only undermines the premise of literary humanitarianism, which supposes that the reader may act as a witness to resolve the conflict about which the narrator testifies. It also calls attention to the absurdity of structuring all stories involving political violence as appeals for human rights.

One way in which Animal attempts to realign the power dynamic between himself and his readership is to identify and address his reader as an individual, rather than as thousands of eyes like flies devouring his story as decaying matter. He calls out to this reader: "In this crowd of eyes I am trying to recognize yours. I've been waiting for you to appear, to know you from all the others" (13). And then, he speaks frankly to this individual reader, stating, "You are reading my words, you are that person. I've no name for you so I will call you Eyes. My job is to talk, yours is to listen. So now listen" (14). Animal imagines the interaction between narrator and reader anew, attempting to circumvent preconceived ideas and hegemonic discursive structures that render the narrator-reader relationship unequal. He confronts and names the individual reader according to this person's basic relationship to the text as a set of eyes. Asserting himself as the narrator whose job it is to talk and assigning his reader the job of listening, he positions himself as the expert and instructs the individual, whose eyes register his words, to listen rather than devour. As this metaphor of eyes listening crisscrosses between the senses, the novel alerts the reader to the shallowness of his/her sensory experience as a reader-witness. By destabilizing the authenticity of sensory descriptions, the text reminds

the reader that such simulations do not enable the reader to experience, and in turn overcome, the suffering described.

Animal continues to complicate the metaphor of witnessing through the senses as he indicates that his story requires the reader to actively listen because he tells it in a way that will disorient a reader who sees the world from a normative perspective and expects to hear a standard testimonial narrative. Remarking to the reader, "[t]he world of humans is meant to be viewed from eye level. Your eyes" (2), he acknowledges his reader's normative way of perceiving the world. Not only does Animal literally see things from a different level (as he says, "Lift my head I'm staring at someone's crotch. Whole nother world it's below the waist" [2]), but from his perspective as a human who is treated as inhuman and who defensively self-identifies as a non-human animal he undermines the discursive framework of human rights. He warns the reader, "If you want my story, you'll have to put up with how I tell it" (2). Because he does not fit within the rigid categories of a humanist framework, he attempts to tell his story and establish a relationship with the reader from the posthumanist vantage point that he develops over the course of the narrative. A closer analysis will detail how Animal cultivates this perspective as his narrative progresses. Broadly speaking though, it is important to note that rather than enabling him to exist outside of or beyond the humanist moment within which he lives, a posthumanist perspective allows Animal to denaturalize humanist assumptions and apply a critical lens to the human rights discourse that frames the corporate violence in Khaufpur.

Animal demonstrates how the Kampani (which is the name the characters in the novel use to refer to the company responsible for the industrial disaster),[67] and those

governments that enable and protect it, treat him and his people as less than human even as they prescribe humanitarian aid as a way to absolve themselves from accepting legal responsibility for the deaths and injuries of thousands of Khaufpuris. After abandoning their factory and eluding a trial for nearly two decades, the Kampani sends a team of lawyers to Khaufpur to negotiate a deal to dismiss allegations against them. One of the Kampani's lawyers, nicknamed "The buffalo," proclaims to a crowd that has gathered in protest: "We're here to offer generous humanitarian aid to the people of Khaufpur" (306). In turn, Gargi, an old woman whose back is almost as bent as Animal's, responds, "Mr. Lawyer, we lived in the shadow of your factory, you told us you were making medicine for the fields. You were making poisons to kill insects, but you killed us instead. I would like to ask, was there ever much difference, to you?" (306). Gargi's question suggests that the Kampani has treated the people who live around their factory in the same manner as they do the insects that their chemicals were designed to exterminate. Ignorant of Gargi's insight and under the impression that she is simply asking for money rather than calling for the Kampani to stand trial and compensate for its offenses, "The buffalo reaches in his red-lined coat, gets out his wallet. 'Buy yourself something nice,' he says. Old Gargi's standing there with five hundred rupees in her hand" (307), which is around ten US dollars. The lawyer's patronizing reply to Gargi's demand that the Kampani take legal and financial responsibility for the crimes it has committed against Khaufpuris illustrates how humanitarian aid is offered as a way to defuse legitimate anger and distract attention from the much costlier and often irreparable damage that victims of corporate violence sustain.

As one of these victims, Animal is offered humanitarian aid to have an operation in the US that will repair his severely bent spine so that he can walk upright. Elli, a doctor from the US who has opened a medical clinic in Khaufpur and sustained a tumultuous friendship with Animal has arranged for the operation, and he is telling this story to figure out if he should have it or not. As he tells the story he deliberates on where he fits on the spectrum between humans and other animals, and he increasingly challenges the humanist logic that constructs humanity as a distinct class. However, in the beginning of his narrative he still judges himself against a humanist standard. Animal's first words to the reader are, "I used to be human once. So I'm told" (1). Though he has no personal recollection of it, Animal was indeed born a regularly functioning human, but just days after the chemical disaster occurred at the factory in Khaufpur, its poison attacked his body, and, left untreated, he eventually could not walk upright. In the language of human rights, the Kampani's negligence and refusal to treat the people they poisoned or properly clean up the contaminated area to prevent further devastation, have undermined his and his people's humanity. Animal, who has a particularly visible physical deformity and has known no other way of being, reacts by outwardly embracing the persona of an animal and shocking people into keeping their distance from him while he secretly wishes he were able to walk on two feet. Thus, he introduces himself growling, "My name is Animal[...] I'm not a fucking human being, I've no wish to be one" (23). And, he explains to the reader, "This was my mantra, what I told everyone. Never did I mention my yearning to walk upright" (23). Animal at first expresses contempt for human beings and resists being associated with those who have treated him as a lesser form of life. Yet, at the same time he covets the human capabilities that elude him.

The important distinction is that Animal is human, but he struggles to figure out a posthumanist way of understanding his existence and his relationship to others. He at first accepts the normative understanding of what it means to be human and rationalizes, "if I agree to be a human being, I'll also have to agree that I'm wrong-shaped and abnormal. But let me be a quatre pattes animal, four-footed and free, then I am whole, my own proper shape, just a different kind of animal from say Jara, or a cow, or a camel" (208). Being "wrong-shaped and abnormal" would define Animal's existence as defective and debilitating, and it would render him a body in perpetual need. Refusing to occupy the subject position of the victim who is compelled to parade his differences as marks of trauma to prove his humanity and appeal for the right to have rights, he initially portrays himself as an animal. He suggests that by classifying himself as an animal he frees himself from a state of inferiority. Yet, this actually reinforces the strict categorization of the human, upholding the idea of the normative human and supporting a distinction between humans and animals.

As the narrative progresses and Animal tells his story his discussion of the human and the animal changes, becoming more nuanced. Whereas early in his story, Animal upholds a distinction between the human and the animal, toward the end he defies this false binary. Ultimately deciding against the operation that would straighten his spine, Animal imagines a different possibility for himself than the narrative trajectory of literary humanitarianism allows. Rather than seeing an operation made possible by generous humanitarian aid as the thing (and the only possible thing at that) that will rescue him from his suffering, he realizes this may not actually be a suitable solution for him at all. He explains,

> See, Eyes, I reckon that if I have this operation, I will be upright, true, but to walk I will need the help of sticks. I might have a wheelchair, but how far will that get me in the gullis of Khaufpur? Right now I can run and hop and carry kids on my back, I can climb hard trees, I've gone up mountains, roamed in jungles. Is life so bad? If I'm an upright human, I would be one of millions, not even a healthy one at that. Stay four-foot, I'm the one and only Animal (366).

Animal recognizes that the surgery may not provide the retribution it promises and that it may actually make his life more difficult. He instead embraces himself as a four-footed human animal with the understanding that his humanity does not elevate him above other animals, human or non-human. He thus embraces his moniker of "Animal" not as a metaphor for human deprivation but as a reminder of the animality of all humans, and acknowledging this animality enables him to think the human in another way. Using a modifier in the phrase "upright human" (366), he nuances traditional definitions, decoupling what it means to be human from its normative discursive framing. He implies that because there are many ways of being human, difference should not undermine an individual's humanity, and one should not have to prove this humanity. His name at once points to the fact that all humans are animals and identifies him as an individual as any other proper name would. He is a four-footed human animal who accepts himself as unique ("the one and only Animal" [366]), rather than attempting to become another iteration of 'universal' humanity.

Even as he accepts himself, however, Animal does not pretend to solve the political problems that the text confronts. After telling his personal story, he concludes, "Eyes, I'm done. Khuda hafez. Go well. Remember me. All things pass, but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us" (366). With this brusque dismissal of his reader, Animal makes it known that by listening to this story the reader does not change the circumstances within which he lives. Telling this

story to the reader does not metaphorically release Animal's people from the toxic conditions within which they experience suffering. The stilted series of farewell sayings that Animal delivers replace the happily-ever-after resolution that the humanitarian reader seeks and give way to the fact that "the poor remain" (366). The text refuses to establish a relationship between a subaltern narrator and a comparatively socioeconomically privileged reader that enables the reader to engage in literary humanitarianism. It reminds the reader that "the people of the Apokalis" (366), the poor people the reader does not usually see who are impacted by politically situated, corporate violence, will not fade into oblivion beneath the chemical vapor from which they emerged in this narrative.

With this conclusion Animal reminds the reader that he has told his story in order to figure out how he will live with the effects of the disaster at the factory in Khaufpur, but telling his story and determining this does not achieve justice for his people. By distinguishing between the personal resolution Animal arrives at as he tells his story and the larger political context within which he exists, the text acknowledges that storytelling does not inherently resolve the socioeconomic disparities and political problems that it describes. As Animal refuses to assimilate to normative human subjectivity, the text reminds the reader that justice is not dependent on Animal proving his personhood and thereby establishing his and his people's right to have rights. Indeed, the text defies a possible repetition of the humanist framework by refusing to project Animal as a hero who embodies a posthumanist ethical solution. In many ways Animal's behavior is highly unethical: he poisons a fellow activist named Zafar out of jealousy of Zafar's relationship with Nisha, a friend that he secretly loves; he spies on and sexually objectifies Elli; and he may even have burned down the ruins of the factory causing the

second night of terror. Animal certainly does not model a perfect posthumanist ethics (such a model would after all only be a reincarnation of humanism by another name), and this is perhaps part of the point: justice should not be dependent on Animal exhibiting an attention-grabbing level of suffering and proving he is worthy of rights. Neither should justice be dependent on Animal accepting humanitarian aid to have an operation to remove visual evidence of a toxic past that remains perceptible in his crooked back.

Animal asks the Eyes to whom he directs his story to listen to what he has to say about the Kampani rather than seeing him as the embodiment of a toxic past and consuming his suffering according to the delusion that this will somehow relieve him of it. He represents his people's suffering not to signify their worthiness of humanitarian aid but to demand accountability from the Kampani. The point Animal is trying to make to the Eyes – to his readership – is that justice should involve the Kampani facing trial. As *Animal's People* encourages the reader to question the power dynamic between the poor "people of the Apokalis" (366) and the privileged readers who devour their stories, it exposes systemic inequalities, calls for legal action, and challenges the logic of human rights and humanitarian aid from a posthumanist perspective.

* * *

This chapter has argued that by portraying conflicts involving political and corporate violence as human rights concerns and informing the reader about such situations by narrativizing the traumatic experiences of 'native informants,' literary humanitarianism

detracts attention from the people who are responsible for such violence and from the power structures within which they operate. While *We Wish to Inform You* and *Country* exemplify the way in which literary humanitarianism attempts to engage the reader as a witness in order to rescue the suffering bodies of those who have been victimized in national and international conflicts, *Animal's People* interrupts the dialectic between the narrator-testifier and the reader-witness. Animal tells his story from a posthumanist perspective, distinguishing between his own non-normative personhood and the Kampani's legal responsibility for contaminating Khaufpur with toxic chemicals. Moreover, he emphasizes that his story does not resolve the transnational power struggle within which his people are victimized. The neoliberal economic policies and national-international power dynamics that allowed for such corporate violence continue to produce systemic inequalities.

In chapter three I comment further on the limitations and the (seemingly contradictory) infinite possibilities for storytelling, concentrating there on the way that literature maintains the openness of the historical archive. In preparation for that chapter's more in depth narratalogical and theoretical analysis of storytelling, and in concluding the current critique of the narrator-testifier and reader-witness dialectic, it is useful to recall Animal's storytelling technique. Animal's way of beginning to tell a story without knowing its end demonstrates that stories do not have to be oriented around an end result. Thus, literature may function as a space within which to rethink the testimonial narrative of human rights. Acknowledging that literature may transgress a humanist teleology and tell a story without knowing what comes next may be the first

step in imagining ways of thinking that are not so limiting as current discursive frameworks.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature and the Archive: Narrating Uncertainty in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*

As I argue in my first two chapters, literature is a space within which human rights discourse equates narrative voice with agency and denies the subaltern the right to have rights; and literary humanitarianism reinforces an imperialistic relationship between suffering victims and privileged readers. If this is the case – if portraying testimony as an aesthetic object or an aesthetic object as testimony in the name of literary humanitarianism fetishizes the suffering that results from political violence and inequality – then, I ask in this chapter, how can storytelling be useful to those who experience deep-rooted, systemic inequality, pervasive economic instability, brutality, torture, or genocide? Acknowledging that efforts of literature to correct for inequitable or biased representation within the archive do not actually rectify systemic problems in the day-to-day political realities within which people live, I suggest that perhaps literature might serve another function. What if literature is applied not as a way to write back to the archive or refine the archive by adding to it but as a meaningful way to confront the chaos of violent political upheaval? Instead of approaching literature as a way to achieve closure, it might instead be appreciated for the openness it allows. As this chapter studies the relationship literature has to the archive and political realities, it analyzes the way literature may occupy multiple temporalities not only to at once remember and forget but also to remain open to the unknown and narrate complications and ruptures that define uncertain political realities.

My argument is not simply that literature may provide a way of narrating uncertainties that a historical record is unable to represent; the key distinction I am making is that literature may do this by offering something other than testimonial narratives that archive political violence as trauma. Rather than attempting to deal with those things that remain unrepresented in the archive by identifying them as unspeakable or unverifiable trauma, literature might be applied as a way to narrate gaps and ruptures in the archive not for the sake of closure but as a way to come to terms with uncertainty. Instead of approaching literature as a way to endow subjects with agency, provoke a humanitarian response from the reader, or resolve systemic inequality within the archive, I call attention to the ability of literary narratives to connect representation within the archive (which is located in the past) to life in the present by allowing different temporalities to coexist. I problematize the notion that literature should act either mimetically or metaphorically to confer the right to have rights on those who cannot claim it for themselves. Rather than using literature to induct another subject to the society of those with the right to have rights or add another right to an already extensive and contradictory list, efforts that both reinforce a rights framework that is based on inclusion and exclusion, literature might offer a way to acknowledge the past and look toward the future without imposing a predetermined teleology. I argue for a consideration of literature as an exploration of lived reality that is not dictated by a rights-oriented testimonial structure in order to shift from a focus on suffering in terms of rights and wrongs to careful consideration of the power relations that produce violence.

By way of reviewing some of the key issues that define the debate about contemporary literary and cultural representations of political violence, I first offer a

concise reading of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. I take up the questions *Anil's Ghost* raises about living in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and early 1990s in a state of political violence with no clear victim–persecutor binary; about the complications that arise when possibilities for representing political violence are governed by a war-torn state and policed by the international human rights community; and about the imperialism at work in the assumption that real world violence in former colonies ends with the conclusion of its Anglophone textual representation. Then, I show how Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* manages the complexities that *Anil's Ghost* reveals about the relationship between the archive, literature, and political reality within the context of post-apartheid South Africa without subscribing to the human rights framework within which *Anil's Ghost* remains trapped. In my analysis of *David's Story*, I consider how literature might remain open to the future without relegating political violence to the past by archiving it as trauma. The psychic metaphor of consciousness renders traumatic political violence unrepresentable. I analyze the way *David's Story* instead confronts apartheid-era torture, sexual abuse, and systemic gender inequality within the African National Congress (ANC; the governing party of the new South Africa) through a gendered metaphor that frames its engagement with the archive and post-apartheid politics.

After a brief discussion of *Anil's Ghost*, I take up *David's Story* as the primary object of analysis in this chapter and explore the politics of literary representation through a narratological analysis of this South African novel whose metanarrative puts the act and object of narration into focus in the context of racial stratification, militarization, and torture. The latter novel's exposition of the writing process along with its protagonist David's preoccupation with the archive and his concerns over the limits of

representation in terms of the variability of truth and the illusiveness of memory provide an opportunity to discuss the use of literature to narrate political events. Not only is *David's Story* a politically engaged novel, but it also illustrates the complications of writing as a way of inscribing oneself within the archive, communicating within and across the archive, and narrativizing what is remembered and what is forgotten to construct and revise the archive. In short, the novel exhibits the relationship that the archive and literary representation have to lived reality.

David's Story is commonly read for what remains unutterable within its narrative. Critics continually propose useful readings of its silences and omissions,[68] and as they comment on the way the unknown figures in the representation of the past and present, several critics notice that the novel is concerned with narrating that which exceeds current discourse.[69] Whereas some rely on the language of trauma to discuss the novel's concern with the function of literature in post-apartheid South Africa,[70] I track the way the novel narrates uncertainties and complications in the moment of transition out of apartheid without reducing political violence to trauma. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's and Jacques Derrida's theorizations of archival temporality and Derrida's notion of an openness to the future that he terms the messianic, I analyze how *David's Story* narrates the gaps and ruptures within the archive. The novel not only demonstrates the messianic nature of the archive, it is also concerned with figuring out how to narrate what remains unknown without foreclosing possibilities. I track how *David's Story* manages the literary in relation to the historical archive by presenting a story populated by undecidable figures like those Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak theorizes in her discussion of the Derridian concept of messianicity. I first identify the way *David's Story* plots the relationship

literature has to the archive and lived reality in post-apartheid South Africa. Then I argue that the novel presents gender as a metaphor that illustrates differing approaches to literature and the archive and reveals the possibilities for a literary openness to the unknown. The novel not only decouples the feminine from testimony about suffering, but also, by gendering the messianic approach to storytelling as feminine and reinterpreting narrative uncertainties as an openness to unknown possibilities, it challenges the distinction that its main character David makes between what he sees as politically important, masculine historiography and ineffective, feminine literary narratives.

To begin with Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* then, in this novel Anil, a forensic pathologist for an international human rights organization, and Sarath, an archaeologist selected by the Sri Lankan government, translate the remains of an individual they name Sailor into testimony about political violence in Sri Lanka. Together, Anil, who "could read Sailor's last actions by knowing the wounds on bone" (Ondaatje 65) and Sarath, who, as "a good archaeologist[,] can read a bucket of soil as if it were a complex historical novel" (151), curate an archive of organic material in an attempt to tell the story of Sailor's political murder. The narrative they construct around the objects they find is shaped by the political circumstances of what Sarath calls "an unofficial war" in which "bodies turn up weekly," "[e]very side [is] killing and hiding evidence," and "no one wants to alienate the foreign powers" (17). Sarath suggests that the violence in Sri Lanka has remained unofficial, or invisible, in part because the world is watching, and it would alienate foreign powers to publicize a war that had "backers on the sidelines in safe countries, a war sponsored by gun- and drug-runners" (43). Caught up in this complex relationship between an internally splintered state, those who circulate international

capital on the black market, and the international human rights community, Anil and Sarath attempt to piece together the story of Sailor's disappearance and political murder.

As the novel depicts the way in which Anil and Sarath formulate a narrative for Sailor, it opens out to a broader discussion about the way that international politics influence representation. At one point in their struggle to establish a story for Sailor, Anil lashes out at Sarath, insisting, "I came here as part of a human rights group[…] I do not work for you[…] I work for an international authority." To this Sarath responds, "This 'international authority' has been invited here by the government" (274). Thus the question arises: in whose name will the representation of Sailor's death be conducted; what political body will sponsor it and/or inhibit it, and how will this shape the representation itself? And, as the novel draws attention to the politics of representation, it also challenges a history of Western cultural representation that depicts protagonists from England and the US as saviors in foreign lands. Thus Anil recalls Gamini, Sarath's brother, remarking,

> American movies, English books – remember how they all end?[...] The American or the Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That's it. The camera leaves with him[…] The tired hero[...] He's going home. So the war, to all purposes, is over. That's enough reality for the West. It's probably the history of the last two hundred years of Western political writing. Go home. Write a book. Hit the circuit (285–6).

Though Anil was raised in Sri Lanka, she has spent her adult life in England and the US, and she has worked in places ravaged by war and political violence as a representative of an international human rights organization based in Geneva. The novel is not only focalized through Anil, it is also written in English by a Sri-Lankan born author who has lived most of his life in Canada. Gamini's comments thus demonstrate the novel's self-consciousness and raise important questions about the role of Anglophone literature in

addressing political violence in places impacted by histories of colonialism and contemporary imperialism. The novel points out that perceiving a political crisis, war, or any type of socioeconomically situated violence as existing only within the bindings of a book or through the lens of a camera and then profiting from this representation is itself an exercise in imperialism.

Even though *Anil's Ghost* is careful not to depict the violence in Sri Lanka as something that will end when its pages run out and it surveys the complications of literary humanitarianism, it still attempts to bridge the gap between political reality and literary representation by presenting itself as testimony. It depicts "a fearful nation" in which "public sorrow was stamped down by the climate of uncertainty" and "Death, loss, was 'unfinished,' so you could not walk through it" (56). Within these grim circumstances, the novel imagines Anil and Sarath using scientific data to provide certainty about Sailor's political murder and offer closure to it. The novel imagines a scenario in which these two scientists are able to access an organic archive (which is perhaps a perfect archive) and read it objectively to identify empirical evidence of a political murder. Yet, even with their scientific evidence the only option available to Anil and Sarath, whose goal it is to expose a crime and prevent further political murders, seems to be to submit a testimonial narrative of Soldier's death, which they have of course constructed, as evidence within a corrupt juridical system that is structured by a divided state and ineffectively policed by the international human rights regime. The human rights regime to which Anil and Sarath appeal on Soldier's behalf has not held up in the context of a civil war that is funded and armed by international powers. The novel tells the story of the failure of both the state and the international human rights

infrastructure, but it still attempts to engage in literary humanitarianism. Within the context of the national and international failure that the novel depicts, Anil identifies Sailor as a "representative of all those lost voices" and determines to tell his story according to the conviction that "[t]o give him a name would name the rest" (56). Like other works of literary humanitarianism, *Anil's Ghost* attempts to provide a space within which narrators and readers may together imagine themselves overcoming uncertainty and achieving closure by acknowledging the story of a victim of political violence.

The novel identifies the influence that human rights discourse has on the narrative production of individual texts and reveals the complications involved in shaping cultural archives on a larger scale. However, it is important to emphasize that even though identifying the problematic ways that human rights discourse shapes the archive may be a key to reconceiving the archive, this alone will not improve political realities. There is discordance between representation within the archive and political reality that no revision to the archive can bridge. While *Anil's Ghost* demonstrates this complication, it remains invested in the archive as a space from which to claim rights for victims of political violence who cannot speak for themselves. The problem that surfaces with *Anil's Ghost* is that no matter how accurate the archive or how grounded representation is in objective facts, narrative accounts of physical and/or emotional trauma cannot deliver state protections by invoking 'universal' human rights.

Although *Anil's Ghost* illustrates the complications involved in navigating national–international human rights networks, it attempts to overcome the failures of both the state and international community via literary humanitarianism. By portraying political violence as personal trauma and then endorsing itself as a form of testimony,

Anil's Ghost tries to supplement the historical record and extend the scope of the juridical. Part of the literary humanitarian project is to fill in gaps in the historical archive by writing back to narratives that fail to represent the subaltern and thereby claim rights for subjects who are unable to do so for themselves. However, as I began to argue in chapter two, treating a complex political history as trauma and working to archive it both suggests the structural apparatus that allowed for the trauma is beyond representation because the psychic metaphor of consciousness suggests trauma surfaces in the archive only as an unspeakable silence, and it acts as if a history of violence can be compartmentalized and dealt with as part of the past by way of testimonial narratives. This positions the political conflict in the past and assumes it will be resolved by archiving evidence of the suffering it generated.

Like *Anil's Ghost*, *David's Story* also deals with political upheaval in a divided state, the complications of the victim–persecutor binary, and the paradoxical relationship between the historical archive, literature, and political reality. However, while *Anil's Ghost* seeks closure by using science to overcome uncertainty, *David's Story* reveals that closure is an impossible cure. *David's Story* is particularly useful not only in studying the way that literary narratives relate to the archive and to contemporary political reality, but also in identifying the productivity of literature that engages the archive as a medium that refuses the kind of closure literary humanitarianism seeks. Published in 2000 after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, Wicomb's novel is set in 1991 South Africa during the period of upheaval before the TRC was created, but after the ANC was unbanned and Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and as apartheid laws are being repealed and multi-party talks for a negotiated settlement are taking place. In

this moment of transition, David Dirkse, a guerilla freedom fighter for Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK; the armed wing of the ANC) is working with an amanuensis to tell his story. This amanuensis is both the narrator of the novel and an unnamed character who struggles with the task of writing about David's activity in the Movement, his time at the ANC's Quatro camps in Angola, and especially his unexplained relationship with Dulcie, a fellow high ranking guerilla. Dulcie has possibly been tortured and may also have tortured others, and she is the key figure representing uncertainty throughout the text.

As David works with the amanuensis he is eager to delve into the archive and incorporate Griqua history into his story.[71] However, determining that David's efforts to historicize his Griqua heritage are actually a way of burying his own secrets, the amanuensis decides to imagine the parts of his story that he refuses to reveal. She rejects David's attempts to engage in a kind of literary testimony that speaks on behalf of subaltern figures, like Saartje Baartman,[72] whom he locates within Griqua history. Instead, she focalizes his story through a series of women whom she portrays both within the Griqua history David constructs and as a part of her frame narrative, which is also heavily appended by flashbacks to the more recent personal histories of David, his wife Sally, their female elders, and Dulcie. The amanuensis's "story of women" (Wicomb 199) challenges David's conception of the historical archive – and the place of political militancy within it – as masculine and the literary as feminine and ineffective. Furthermore, as the novel refuses to present this "story of women" (199) as a form of testimony that conceptualizes political violence in terms of trauma, it undermines the notion that testimony of suffering is a feminine narrative mode.[73]

My examination of the way *David's Story* plots the archive in the world is informed by Achille Mbembe's and Jacques Derrida's theorizations of the archive. Mbembe points out, "the archive imposes a qualitative difference between co-ownership of dead time (the past) and living time, that is, the immediate present" ("The Power" 21). And, he explains in more depth, "the time woven together by the archive is the product of a composition. This time has a political dimension resulting from the alchemy of the archive: it is supposed to belong to everyone. The community of time, the feeling according to which we would all be heirs to a time over which we might exercise the rights of collective ownership: this is the imaginary that the archive seeks to disseminate" (21). The distinction between the "dead time (the past)" of the archive, which "belong[s] to everyone" and "living time" experienced by individuals in "the immediate present" (21) plays out in Wicomb's novel as David tries to use storytelling both as a way to distance himself from what he has done in the name of the Movement and to honor the work of the Movement by inducting it into an archive over which there is "collective ownership" (21). As the amanuensis surmises, "[h]e wanted me to write it, not because he thought that his story could be written by someone else, but rather because it would no longer belong to him. In other words, he both wanted and did not want it to be written. His fragments betray the desire to distance himself from his own story; the many beginnings, invariable flights into history, although he is no historian, show uncertainty about whether to begin at all" (Wicomb 1). If his story no longer belongs to him, but to an amanuensis and a communal archive, David will, in a sense, be freed of it.

Yet, David's training as an MK freedom fighter has taught him that secrecy is crucial to security, and in his continued allegiance to the ANC he is tasked with figuring

out "how to maintain an army whilst officially dismantling it" (108). In order to provide the impression of "dismantling" this "army" he historicizes it, but to avoid the details of contemporary politics he retreats into historiographic metafiction.[74] He invokes an inaccurate communal history that he insists exists in the archive in order to plot himself, and the Movement to which he has dedicated his life, within this archive without disclosing his own secrets or those of the Movement.

David is intent on archiving his story of the Movement at this particular moment of transition out of apartheid-era rule in order to render violent events part of the past; to make what happened belong to the public not just the individual; and to honor the ideals for which the Movement has stood. And, to a certain extent, forgetting is a necessary part of the transition that he seeks to implement with the help of the amanuensis. Derrida details how the archive enables forgetting, explaining,

> the archive – the good one – produces memory, but produces forgetting at the same time. And when we write, when we archive, when we trace, when we leave a trace behind us – and that's what we do each time we trace something, even each time we speak, that is we leave a trace which becomes independent of its origin, of the movement of its utterance – the trace is at the same time the memory, the archive, and the erasure, the repression, the forgetting of what it is supposed to keep safe. That's why, for all these reasons, the work of the archivist is not simply a work of memory. It's a work of mourning. And a work of mourning, as everyone knows, is a work of memory but also the best way just to forget the other, to keep the other in oneself, to keep it safe, in a safe – but when you put something in a safe it's just in order to be able to forget it, okay? When I handwrite something on a piece of paper, I put it in my pocket or in the safe, it's just in order to forget it, to know that I can find it again while in the meantime having forgotten it ("Archive Fever" 54).

David's Story narrativizes the paradox of at once remembering and forgetting by way of the archive. Though David does imagine a revisionist history, he engages the archive not simply to remember certain things and forgets others, but also in the sense that Derrida describes. He wants his story written to allow it to become "independent of its origin"

(Derrida, "Archive Fever" 54), meaning independent of him. He also hopes writing it will place it "in a safe" where it will be protected but where he will also "be able to forget it" (54) and move on. In the post-apartheid South African context in which Wicomb writes this novel, the paradox of at once remembering and forgetting is especially relevant. Following the TRC hearings and Nelson Mandela's landmark presidency, which both endeavored to define a new South Africa, this novel explores the difficulties involved in addressing the effects of pervasive apartheid-era inequality and violence while building a new South African government through a negotiated settlement between oppressor and oppressed and the various factions responsible for widespread violence.

David's Story illustrates how the archive operates in South Africa as "a work of mourning" (Derrida, "Archive Fever" 54). Not only for apartheid-era inequality and violence, but also for David himself, who dedicated his and his family's lives to the Movement and who, it is revealed at the end of the novel, has died partway through his project with the amanuensis. For the amanuensis, the text is a work of mourning that attempts to make sense of the fragments of information David has provided and to come to terms with the knowledge that the ANC engaged in political murders and torture in the name of the Movement.

Throughout the novel the amanuensis emphasizes the practical and ethical difficulties she has writing David's story, and following an episode in which a gunman destroys her computer, she ends her narrative (which she has backed up externally), writing: "My screen is in shards. / The words escape me. / I do not acknowledge this scrambled thing is mine. / I will have nothing more to do with it. / I wash my hands of this story" (Wicomb 213). With the gunshot in the narrator's computer screen, the world

of the archive – which catalogues the past in writing – collides with the real world of her lived reality in the present. The fragmented nature of David's story is reflected in the "shards" of her computer screen as she ends the narrative in the form of what may be seen as the breakdown of narrative structure or as a poem. Each line that follows evokes a double meaning. She at once has no words to adequately tell David's story and as she formulates them the "words escape" her control; she does not see "this scrambled thing" as hers, which suggests it not only does not belong to her but that it belongs to something greater than her; and she will have "nothing more to do with it," which also suggests it will take on a life of its own with each new reading. And, finally, in the last line she absolves herself of responsibility by cleansing the hands that write words that at once remember and forget. The amanuensis's washing of her hands calls to mind Dulcie's incessant hand washing (her "hands are raw with washing" [181]), and as a trope hand washing evokes Pontius Pilate washing his hands before sending Jesus to his death. The insinuation is that, like Pilate, Dulcie and the amanuensis both participate in violence reluctantly – Dulcie as a possible agent of torture and the amanuensis by exposing dangerous secrets that both undermine the authority of the ANC and put Dulcie at risk. Dulcie's need to continually wash her hands is also a reminder that absolution is a process of remembering and forgetting that is ongoing and never finished. Rather than reading this text at the end of the novel as broken lines signaling the decline of narrative, I see them as a poem whose multiple meanings demonstrate how literature adapts and changes with new readings. It is through this risky sort of openness that literature allows a space for the continual process of remembering and forgetting as it connects the historical archive to lived reality.

If writing is a space within which to remember and forget, the novel plots the complications of doing so when writing is restricted or even forbidden. David not only employs the amanuensis as an archivist, bestowing on her the responsibility of recording his story, and acts as an archivist himself in his evaluation of Griqua history. He also depends on writing to archive his own thoughts, even though this violates the security policy that governs him as a freedom fighter. In fact,

> He cannot think without writing things down, a longstanding defiance of rules, but he has developed his own set of rules for the transgression that renders it safe as houses: he uses the smallest possible slip of paper, which he always removes from its pad to ensure that there is no imprint; it is never left unattended; he shoves it into his mouth at the slightest interruption; improvised and inconsistent codes and abbreviations make it, in any case, difficult to read; and the note exists only as long as he is busy writing – he destroys it as soon as he arrives at conclusions (107).

Personally, David engages in the act of writing in order to think things through, not to produce a readable text or leave an "imprint" within a public archive. Indeed, when he is not chronicling Griqua history, he takes great care to ensure his writing remains illegible. He does not simply defy the rules of the Movement, but also establishes his own variation on its guidelines to ensure the transgressive act of writing is "safe as houses" (107). Derrida's discussion of writing ("When I handwrite something on a piece of paper, I put it in my pocket or in the safe, it's just in order to forget it, to know that I can find it again while in the meantime having forgotten it [Derrida, "Archive Fever" 54]) is particularly relevant here. David's allusion to his attempts to secure his writing within a safe house may reflect his own struggle as a high-ranking leader within the Movement to at once remember and forget in the interest of security, for the sake of maintaining the public image of the ANC, and in order to assuage his own conscience. After all, he is writing in this instance in order to consider "how to maintain an army whilst officially dismantling

it" (Wicomb 108). Maintaining the militancy of the ANC while appearing to dismantle it involves installing it within an archival past and projecting a peaceful future. As David faces this paradox and tries to reconcile a militant past with the prospect of a nonviolent future, he not only accesses the archive to perform a revisionist history of his Griqua heritage so as to use this as a model for moving forward after apartheid, as Dorothy Driver suggests.[75] At the same time, he also seeks temporary asylum in a present that he identifies with the act of writing – for him writing offers a way to confront his own uncertainty, but for the sake of security he clings to the belief that "the note exists only as long as he is busy writing" (Wicomb 107). He relies on writing to process his thoughts and formulate new possibilities, but he attempts to suspend his writing in a present temporality so that it does not become part of the historical record.

David's relationship to writing is perplexing not simply because it is contradictory, but also because in featuring David's own writing (both his personal musings and his narrative of Griqua history) and the amanuensis's writing about him, the novel explores the possibilities for a methodology of writing that has not yet fully materialized. Though David is extremely cynical about the role of literature in the Movement and the narrator's frustration at the writing process is palpable (sometimes even overshadowing David's story); David insists the amanuensis must write his story and she takes great risks to do so. The conflicting ideas about writing that the novel displays and its characters' struggles to engage in the writing process suggest that literature is being asked to function differently in this novel – perhaps in a way that has not yet been entirely realized. David at once relies on writing to figure things out but also tries to prevent his writing from being read. He also maintains that literature does not

make a revolution ("No point, David says scornfully, in reading about freedom when we should be playing active roles towards attaining it" [140]), but he enlists an amanuensis to write his story. So, the narrator wonders,

> Why, then, does David want his story written – which is to say, have it read? Yes, he does feel ambivalent about this project, which invites a reader to perform a task he does not value. But he cannot explain: he is in a sense ashamed of appearing to be vain, of thinking of himself as special. It is not that he wants to be remembered; rather, it is about putting things down on paper so that you can see what there is, shuffle the pages around, if necessary, until they make sense (140).

Though he becomes sidetracked with reconstructing and recording Griqua history, David is not interested in documenting his story so as to be remembered, and he certainly does not accept the interface between text and reader as a way to engage in political activity. What is ultimately at stake in this novel is not how literature might shape or revise the archive or how it might achieve the "freedom" (140) for which David has fought; literary narrative is not being proposed as a means to accomplish a political project. Instead, the novel presents literature as a way to "see what there is" and "make sense" of it (140). Rather than submitting testimony to its reader as part of a political appeal, *David's Story* uses the narrative freedom available to literature to "shuffle the pages" of the recent history of South Africa around. At a time when literature is increasingly proposed as a way to do the work of human rights, *David's Story* seeks a different methodological approach to storytelling, and it is therefore useful in considering possibilities for conceptions of justice that are not restricted within a rights-based framework that depends on the acceptance of testimonial narratives into the archival record.

While the text acknowledges that writing constructs an archive that defines how histories are understood and indicates where power is located, the purpose of the novel is not to infiltrate this archive and induct David into the official historical record. Resolving

not to make David's story about writing back to the official archive, an activity into which David initially diverges with his attempts to write an account that reinscribes Saartje Baartman within a celebratory narrative of Andrew Le Fleur and Griqua origins,[76] the amanuensis says to David: "There are quite enough of these stories" (135). In this moment, the novel acknowledges the project of writing back, and it takes a stand against using literature to recover the oppressed figure of Baartman. Plotting Baartman within a revisionist history would further subjugate her in the name of David's contemporary political agenda. Rather the novel showcases the multiple ways that writing operates in relation to David – both in his life and in the way the amanuensis narrativizes it – to explore how writing might otherwise be deployed.[77]

Because the frame narrative about the amanuensis's experience writing David's story draws attention to all other instances of writing in the novel, there is a slippage between different forms of writing that is useful in considering the limitations and possibilities of literary texts. For example, when David comes across a hit list with his and Dulcie's names on it, it becomes clear that writing may be used as a weapon, but his attempts to counteract the hit list through his own scribbling and re-inscription demonstrate the limit point of engaging writing as a performative act. The narrator describes how the hit list operates explaining, "The hit list is a cultural variation on sticking pins into a doll or sending a tokolos – a demon – to undermine the intended victim" (112). Marking a name down in the ledger of a hit list enacts a death sentence through writing. As David scans the list its neatly printed script pierces into his consciousness – he cannot un-read his name or disassociate from it. The narrator describes his desperate reaction, continuing,

> Inviolable like the tokolos, a hit list cannot be amended in any way. To pluck the pins out of the wax doll is not a possibility, for there is no longer a subject to perform such a task. What David does is therefore something of a miracle, something performed in the trance of his freedom mantra. He can, of course, not touch his own, but he scores her name out with a pen, repeatedly, so that it can no longer be recognised. The terror mounts with each stroke of the blue ballpoint. When the name is completely obliterated, he shudders at what he has done. Has he, the intended, been directed into acting, into becoming the agent for others? (116–17).

Once the hit list is written, it exists in the world as a text that functions separately from its author; there is no subject who can un-write it. In the "trance of his freedom mantra" (116), as if under a rhetorical spell, David attempts to achieve a "miracle" (116) and assume the position of the author-figure so as to remove Dulcie's name. But, by scratching out her name "so it can no longer be recognised" (117) and is "completely obliterated" (117), David obscures Dulcie completely, leaving no recorded trace of her. In a sense he fulfills the action for which the hit list calls, and all that remains is the scribbled evidence of a power struggle over her presence on the list. Dulcie herself is gone; her individual existence is beyond recognition.

When David realizes he may have become "the agent of others" (117) by striking out Dulcie's name on the hit list, he endeavors to rectify the situation by writing her name anew as if by creating a text that writes back to the original he might set things right. The narrator recounts, "By way of making amends to Dulcie he writes her name on another clean sheet of paper. Below it he writes: It is they who obliterate her name" (117). Counteracting the hit list with his own textual assertion and casting blame on an unidentified "they" does not un-write Dulcie's obliteration. David's frustration with the hit list illustrates the paradox of writing back – this dialectic reinforces the framework within which power operates. Rather than asking literature to constitute a performative

act (to write back to an oppressive power structure on behalf of Baartman or Dulcie), the novel observes the limitations of such a project. It proceeds from this point not in order to enact a particular politics but to engage in a reflective exercise that explores the latent possibilities that might emerge out of the literary process.

To put it in a Derridian sense, *David's Story* struggles to figure out how to engage in a kind of storytelling that is "future-oriented" (Derrida, "Archive Fever" 46) but not teleological – a kind of storytelling that has "no horizon of expectation" (46). Derrida's discussion of messianicity is useful in defining the challenges that the novel confronts in its engagement with the archive and its metanarrative about storytelling. He defines his terms explaining, "What I call the messianic is simply the relationship to the future, the expectation of what comes, with no horizon of expectation. Anyone, anything might happen or arrive" (46). In the moment of transition out of apartheid that *David's Story* inhabits, the archive is of particular importance because it is a site for negotiating the process of remembering and forgetting. As I have shown, the novel comments on the relationship that archival representation has to political reality in South Africa as apartheid is being dismantled. If, as Derrida contends, "there is a messianic, a messianicity, implied in the very experience of the archive. And that's also why it is impossible to close the archive" (46), the novel questions what this means for its militant MK freedom fighters in the midst of a negotiated settlement between the ANC (itself internally fractured) and the apartheid government led by the National Party. How will the ANC – the governing party of the new South Africa – retain authority if knowledge of torture within its ranks is made available within an archive that is impossible to close and always open to reinterpretation?

The novel exhibits the complexity of a negotiated settlement as it calls attention to the torture that has occurred within the ANC against its own members as well as the persistent racial stratification of the black, coloured, and white populations within and across the various political parties in South Africa.[78] Since, as Derrida observes, "[i]t's always possible to re-interpret an archive. And this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility, an ethical and political responsibility" ("Archive Fever" 46), *David's Story* tries to negotiate the ethical and political complications of this responsibility in the context of the transition out of apartheid. The novel's efforts to narrate the ethical and political challenges at this particular moment in South Africa circle around its fleeting visions of Dulcie, who, the amanuensis admits, has "always hovered somewhere between fact and fiction" (Wicomb 198). Imagining Dulcie harboring a secret, the narrator writes, "In these times of negotiation, the small, secret world of the guerilla has grown cracks; her own little secret has come to stand for something else, something to do with a world blown up, enlarged, so that comrades huddle like startled animals in unfamiliar groups" (198). The transition out of apartheid exposes not only the violence of the apartheid government but also the atrocities committed by anti-apartheid guerillas against each other. The "secret world of the guerilla" is now being exposed, and Dulcie's personal secret is a sign of the ruptures within the Movement.

The vague representation of Dulcie's secret, to which the novel continually alludes but never fully discloses, demonstrates the challenges of narrativizing "a world blown up" (198). The reader is left to speculate: Is Dulcie's secret a desire for David who is not only married but also off-limits as a fellow leader within the Movement? (Dulcie

refers to David and her "private teenage obsession" [198].) Or, perhaps her secret is that she has been (and still is) tortured? (She has scars on her back, describes the "delirium of pain" (82), and refers to "visits by night" [184].) Could it also be that David has tortured her? ("His fingertips pressed precisely into the wounds under her shirt, plunged intimately into her flesh, caressed every cavity, every organ, her lungs, liver, kidneys, her broken heart, with a lick of fire" [199].) Or maybe even, she has tortured others? ("Dulcie washes the sticky red from her hands" [18] and "her hands are raw with washing" [181].) If Dulcie and her elusive secret reflects the chaos of "a world blown up" (198), the image of "comrades huddle[d] like startled animals in unfamiliar groups" (198) signals the resulting collapse of humanist classifications. No longer confined within their familiar groups, the comrades are suddenly out in the open, stripped of the humanist codes that once camouflaged their animality.

Perhaps embracing animality – freed from the humanist construction of it as Other – is a way to open up to the messianic. *David's Story* shows how being open to messianicity challenges a testimonial narrative structure. Instead of reinforcing a juridical notion of storytelling as a way of delivering testimony, *David's Story* portrays writing as an exercise that is all about "see[ing] what there is" and "shuffl[ing] the pages around, if necessary, until they make sense" (140). Not only can writing be a way to dwell in the unknown and think things through, but also, in literature anything is possible. Yet, as literary humanitarianism applies humanist ideals of subject development, it imposes a teleology on the literary that forecloses the messianic. Spivak acknowledges this tension, observing, "Literature contains the element of surprising the historical. But it is also true that a literary text produces the effect of being inevitable – indeed, one might argue that

the effect is what provokes reading, as transgression of the text" (*Death of a Discipline* 55). If literature is able to imagine possibilities outside of the historical record, the textual form also seems to enable the reader to skip ahead and read the last page to find out what will happen. *David's Story* does not allow the reader to satisfy this urge because it not only interrupts a linear chronology, but also manages temporality differently.

The novel includes frequent vignettes or episodic flashes of Dulcie that are not in sync with either the chronology of the frame narrative or David's actual story. Dulcie is always portrayed in the present tense, suspended in time as David and the narrator try to figure out how to account for her – how to narrate her. Thus, the amanuensis comments,

> There is no progression in time, no beginning and no end. Only a middle that is infinitely repeated, that remains in an eternal, inescapable present. This is why David wants her simply outlined, wants her traced into his story as a recurring imprint in order to outwit her fixedness in time, in order for her to go on, to proceed, as in the stories he sometimes finds time to tell his children: and then and then and then" (Wicomb 150–1).

Dulcie only surfaces in fragmented presents that flicker throughout the narrative. If literature allows for a space to try to figure out how to narrate Dulcie and her secret (which "has come to stand for something else, something to do with a world blown up" [198]), David's inclination is to string together isolated "imprint[s]" (150) of her so as to camouflage her (and the complication she represents) and plot her within a historical narrative that follows a linear chronology. The novel, however, confronts Dulcie's "fixedness in time" (151) as the amanuensis struggles to narrate the rupture that Dulcie signifies without knowing what its effects will be in the future. Thus, in the hands of the amanuensis the story proceeds without knowledge of what is to come.[79] Much like Indra Sinha's Animal who tells his story in *Animal's People* in order to "find out what the end

should be" (Sinha 365; see my analysis of Sinha's novel in chapter two), Wicomb's narrator tells David's story in order to actually figure out what the story is.[80]

Like *Animal's People*, *David's Story* explores a posthumanist method of storytelling that occurs without a narratological blueprint of what is to come. Building on Derrida's discussion of messianicity as well as his concept of teleopoiesis, Spivak identifies the value of approaching the literary without preconceived expectations. She promotes teleopoiesis as a way "to affect the distant in a *poiesis* – an imaginative making – without guarantees, and thus, by definitive predication, reverse its value" (*Death of a Discipline* 31). Engaging literature not as a means to an end but as a way to welcome the unknown may open up a space for the messianic to emerge. One way literary works might encourage such openness is by interrupting the developmental trajectory of the normative humanist narrative. In this vein, Spivak identifies a-chrony (as defined by Mieke Bal) as a literary device that can keep an "event's status narratalogically undecidable" (64).[81] A-chrony occurs in *David's Story* in the glimpses of Dulcie that occur outside of the diagetic time of the narrative. As a representation of the "narratalogically undecidable" (64), the elusive Dulcie is a continual reminder of the uncertainty not only in the amanuensis's narrative but also in the transitional moment in which the novel is set.

Self-conscious about the ambiguity in the narrative she provides, the amanuensis is careful to point out that the gaps in the story she tells are not a reflection of her subjectivity. She separates her personal identity from the story she relays, forewarning, "I would hate a reader to think that my failure to provide facts, to bridge the gaps in the narrative, has something to do with the nature of our relationship. Or with my gender.

David was simply unable/unwilling to disclose all" (Wicomb 2). Though the amanuensis may be making this point out of pride, this distinction between the identity of the narrator and the story itself is worth pursuing. This work is about analyzing the process of storytelling itself not about defining a subject through storytelling. Even at the level of dialogue, which occurs through free indirect discourse throughout the novel, speech is detached from any one person so that the sources of the story's elements remain vague.[82] Furthermore, the amanuensis's mention of gender here, in the preface that frames the novel, raises a valuable set of questions: Is the messianic approach to storytelling gendered? How does *David's Story* showcase and/or challenge the literary as feminine and historiography as masculine? How does the novel's treatment of gender shape its attempt to think through the political moment with which it is concerned?

The novel exposes several gendered assumptions about the literary and its relationship to militancy and the historical archive. The amanuensis's concern that the gaps in the story will be read as an effect of her gender become more significant as David expresses the idea that writing is a mode of impotent intellectualism compared to militarism, which is portrayed as a masculine form of action throughout the novel. David regards reading as an activity in which women "take refuge" (25), and he argues that "the mad poets and painters in bandanas bandying about their stuff on the suburban battlefields of Observatory" (140) are politically ineffectual.[83] He is also upset with the amanuensis for presenting the history he wants to tell as "a story of women" (199). He reprimands her, grumbling, "You have turned it into a story of women; it's full of old women, for God's sake[...] Who would want to read a story like that? It's not a proper history at all" (199). David contrasts this "story of women" with a "proper history" (199),

suggesting that history is gendered male. His insinuation that no one of any consequence will want to read about women reveals the logic by which a masculinist "proper history" may omit considerations of women. The novel upends the notion that the amanuensis's gender may explain the gaps in the story by showing the exclusions that make up David's gendered understanding of history.

Rather than interpreting the tension between David and the amanuensis as a simple power struggle between a masculinist historiography and a feminist mode of storytelling, it is useful to consider the novel's treatment of gender as a metaphor through which the gaps and uncertainties of the literary may be understood as spaces from which the messianic might emerge. If the feminine is associated with emptiness – with narrative gaps and a lack of substance worthy of "proper history" (199) – gendering the messianic approach to storytelling as feminine is a way of reinterpreting narrative gaps and uncertainties as openness to the unknown. The "story of women" (199) that the female amanuensis tells is an accumulation of uncertainties, and the novel attempts to narrate the unknown by way of these women. However, the novel's study of the way each of these individual women experiences the literary disqualifies any accusations of biological essentialism that might be made against it. To be clear, there is a distinction in the novel between feminine storytelling as a metaphor for the messianic approach to the literary and the individual gendered bodies that make up the story.[84]

David's wife Sally exemplifies the way that conceptions of literature may be shaped independent of one's biology. In addition to David's view of reading as an activity within which women retreat and his low opinion of literary intellectuals, the novel explores the relationship gender has to the literary and political in its depiction of

Sally. In the opinion of Sally's mother, "Reading, lying across a bed casting her eyes over print, was a decent way for a girl to spend her time and could only keep her out of mischief" (118). When Sally was a child reading was cast for her as a leisure activity meant to occupy the empty time of girlhood, and she resents its confinement. As an adult, Sally feels further restricted by recurrent textual images of "the bodies of black women" and the "tragedy of being coloured" (117),[85] which discipline the female body by dictating what it means to be a strong black woman or a "tragic" coloured woman. For Sally,

> It was the movement that offered freedom in the form of loose khaki trousers and a break from reading about the sad coloured condition. And marriage to David, she sighed, that lost her place in MK – and took her back to the overrated business of reading novels. How could such things possibly be called weapons of the struggle? Perhaps the stuff and nonsense that is said nowadays about culture is meant to placate women like herself, and she rises stiffly onto her own good solid legs to cook sausages for the children, whose voices rollick down the length of the street as they chant: You won't make it to heaven / Without the AK-47 (119).

Sally views the literary and political as two distinct sites because the novels she reads narrate the political by fetishizing the bodies of black and coloured women. She is happy to escape novels that represent her "sad coloured condition" (119) for a position in MK, because it promises her an opportunity to combat that condition that her novels only seem to reinforce. Becoming a wife and mother excludes her once again from the masculine space of MK and relegates her to the world of her novels. Thus, after Sally recalls this history, "she rises stiffly onto her own good solid legs" (119), like one of the characters with "good thick legs" (117) in her novels. Yet, the text subtly undermines Sally's generalizations about the literary; the militant chant Sally hears the children singing is formatted in the text as a poem, and such a mantra has the effect of reproducing freedom fighters for the Movement.

The text exposes the false promises of MK, suggesting it has set up an erroneous dichotomy between the intellectual as passive and feminine and the militant as active and masculine. Despite Sally's insistence that the movement offered her "freedom in the form of loose khaki trousers" (119), which camouflage femininity, she is still subordinated as a woman within the Movement. Rather than calling it rape, Sally forces herself to consent when a male comrade tells her: "A fuck, that's what you need" (123). Sally's body does not belong to herself but to the Movement, and at various moments the Movement defines her body differently. As a guerilla in "loose khaki trousers" (119) she is freed from the confines of her girlhood, but in the moment of the sexual encounter her body is sexualized and her needs are dictated for her. Then, after she has "forced herself" to fulfill this "unspoken part of a girl's training" (123), "she los[es] her fear, f[inds] her body dissolving" (123). Not only is fear associated with her feminine body, but also after she undergoes her training as a girl, she does not become a woman, but rather her body disappears. Sally's body reemerges when she loses her place in MK to become a wife and mother (notice marriage and fatherhood do not supplant David's position in MK), and she returns to reading novels that reflect back clichéd images of her female body in their attempts to narrate the political.

It is the type of novels that Sally reads – those that fetishize female bodies and the subordination of women – that *David's Story* problematizes. The amanuensis not only features Sally's derision of such novels, but also, as I have already discussed, she refuses to allow David to turn this story into a revisionist tale of Saartje Baartman. Instead, *David's Story* considers how literature might shift from fetishizing the bodies of women like Sally, Baartman, and Dulcie to allowing bodies to be something more than the

conditions they currently represent. This means being open to what might emerge but cannot yet be fully named; it means allowing literature to narrate the political in a way that is open to uncertainty and the unknown. The novel gestures toward such a mode of storytelling by attempting to narrate Dulcie as one who remains unknown. Unlike Sally who loses her place in MK to be David's wife and a mother to their children, Dulcie is a powerful woman within the movement. Not only does her androgyny interrupt the false dichotomy between the masculine as politically active and the feminine as passive, but also, unlike Sally who finds herself restricted within the clichés of her novels, Dulcie eludes straightforward representation.

Dulcie, who represents the unknown in the novel's gendered metaphor, further complicates the divide between literary intellectualism and political militancy in her desire for writing. Whereas reading novels is an empty, feminine exercise for Sally, with Dulcie writing retains the productive possibility of making something tangible. From Dulcie's perspective, "If speech is not allowed, she would like to have something written up, or written down. Dulcie once thought that she knew the difference. She would like to think that somewhere there are suitable words with which to say, to ask what she needs to know, to record what she thinks she knows. Then there would be something tangible, something to write, something to read" (198). Dulcie's confusion over whether something should be written "up" or "down" (198) puts the act of writing under pressure and shows that its function is in flux. She wants words to exist "to say," "to ask," and/or "to record" (198) so that writing will make things intelligible. But, making things "tangible" (198) in the standard way in which Dulcie describes ("to record what she thinks she knows" [198]) is also dangerous. Dulcie "fears for any such writing. Although

they come in the early hours she has to be vigilant at all times. Worse than any instrument of torture is the thought of such hard-found words being fingered by them – jabbed, clubbed, defaced into a gibberish that would turn the thing between David and herself into nothing" (198). The threat of the comrades, who the novel suggests come in the night to torture Dulcie, prevent her from putting her secret into words, "[a]nd so she does not write, neither up nor down; and so she is drawn into silence, becomes his mirror image, silent like him." (198). With Dulcie, who represents the unknown, the novel both invokes the potential of writing and acknowledges that what one writes may be manipulated ("jabbed, clubbed, defaced into gibberish" [198]) and incorporated to reinforce existing power structures. While not advocating silence, this depiction of Dulcie's anxiety about her words being "defaced" (198) demonstrates the dangers of writing. It provides a reminder that the amanuensis is taking a risk by writing this narrative; the descriptions that the amanuensis provides of Dulcie may be misread or manipulated so that they do violence to Dulcie. Yet, if the amanuensis does not take the risk of narrating Dulcie as an undecidable figure, Dulcie will remain David's "mirror image" (198), and as a reflection of his crisis, Dulcie will be silent when he is silent.

The way in which Dulcie is and is not represented in the novel expresses the controversies that complicate literary representation. The narrator suggests Dulcie is silent because she wants to defend her secret against her torturers who she fears will mutilate her words. The text, in turn, attempts to narrate Dulcie's silence, and it problematizes David's abstraction of Dulcie into an expression of his crisis as an MK leader trying to maintain his militancy (which empowered him against the violence of the apartheid system) amidst talks for a negotiated peace. When David describes Dulcie to

the amanuensis as "a kind of a scream somehow echoing through my story" (134), the amanuensis reacts: "A scream, I laugh, a scream? You won't get away now with abstracting her. Besides, Dulcie herself would never scream. Dulcie is the very mistress of endurance and control. Dulcie knows that there is only a point to screaming if you can imagine someone coming to your rescue; that a scream is an appeal to a world of order and justice – and that there is no such order to which she can appeal" (134). A scream is a universal signal of distress that communicates a refusal to accept something; it is a call for help that is immediately comprehensible on a global scale in a world that is governed by order and justice. For Dulcie though, representation is not about being rescued, and her torture by her comrades suggests there is no order or justice in the world she inhabits. Dulcie wishes to find "suitable words"(198) to identify what she knows and does not know and perhaps articulate her secret in a way that may not be co-opted and distorted by a larger power syndicate. But, all around Dulcie are those like her torturers who would disfigure her and her secret or those like David who, wishing "to protect her" (199) turns her into an abstraction to either appeal in vain to order and justice or justify a reactionary militancy.

At stake in the novel is the way in which Dulcie – the uncertain complication – is narrated and how she will be read. Bringing Spivak's discussion of the subject in literary representation to bear on my reading of *David's Story* underscores Dulcie's significance as a figure who defies normative narrative conventions. Spivak notices, "All around us is the clamor for the rational destruction of the figure, the demand not for clarity but immediate comprehensibility by the ideological average. This destroys the force of literature as a cultural good" (*Death of a Discipline* 71). Representing Dulcie as "a

scream" (Wicomb 134) – as a symbol of a type of distress that cannot be represented in words – would invoke the rational destruction of the figure, because it would portray her solely as an anonymous body in need calling out to be rescued. Figuring Dulcie as a scream would make her immediately comprehensible as a victim (or depending on one's reading, as a perpetrator or witness), and even though David does not intend to, he effaces her with this description. The novel as a whole, however, pointedly resists the presentation of Dulcie as a normative humanist subject who is calling out for help and appealing for her rightful place in the archival record. Instead, the novel narrates Dulcie in a way that encourages a different kind of reading. Describing the type of reading that I am suggesting *David's Story* promotes, Spivak contends, "to learn to read is to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again" (*Death of a Discipline* 72). To learn to read Dulcie, the woman who defies the gendered power structure that disciplines the female body and institutes a binary between the literary as feminine and the political as masculine, is to learn to read the uncertain, messianic figure.

David's Story exhibits the process by which its narrator attempts to tell a story in which Dulcie, a messianic figure who complicates archival representation, interrupts the project of its protagonist, David, to plot the transition out of apartheid in South Africa. As the narrator struggles to demonstrate the role of literature in accounting for and overcoming political violence, the novel makes the moment of writing the focus rather than asking the trace in the archive to do the work of securing justice. The novel refuses to depict its characters screaming out from the archive in "an appeal to a world of order and justice" (Wicomb 134); it confronts the uncertain truth that "there is no such order" (134). After years of institutionalized racial violence and terror, in the context of political

upheaval in which each side attempting to negotiate a settlement is responsible for rape, torture, and murder, the novel confronts the disorder of the moment of transition out of apartheid. It presents storytelling as a way to think through the unknown, to move fluidly amongst past, present, and future temporalities, and to allow for both remembering and forgetting without resorting to a linear construction of history. By identifying gender as a site of contradiction and narrating its resulting gaps and ruptures as openings, the novel appeals for justice from a future that it cannot yet imagine but to which it remains open.

Demonstrating how the archive is open to the messianic, the novel suggests literature might be useful in narrating uncertainty in a way that historiography does not. It depicts the difficulty of this project, and offers no easy resolution. Even in the last scene of the novel, the narrator writes:

> I shriek as a bullet explodes into the back of the computer. Its memory leaks a silver puddle onto the desk, and the shrapnel of sorry words scuttle out, leaving behind whole syllables that tangle promiscuously with strange stems, strange prefixes, producing impossible hybrids that scramble my story. I look out, across at the full fig tree, where a figure leisurely takes his leave, climbing over the wall and crushing my black-eyed Suzies. Is this no longer my house, bought from the red-faced man with the lackluster sales talk? Will I never know what's going on? Does no one care what I think? Will I ever be heard above the rude buzz of bluebottles? (212–13).

The narrator's house is invaded; it is not safe and her writing is not protected within it. Even if writing is made "safe as houses" (107) as David insists he makes his own writing, this passage shows the safe house being ransacked. The archive is not safe; it is not a safe; it is in chaos, continually changing. The safe house (the narrator's house) has been infiltrated; "memory leaks" (212), "words scuttle" (212) and "tangle" (212), and "hybrids[...] scramble" (213) the story. The historical record is a mess and stories that one might hope would set things straight get shuffled around and do not seem to be producing

easy answers. Rather than offering a concise resolution, narrative closure is exposed as a false promise. But, without even the pretense of control that closure offers, the ability of literature to both survive the violence that threatens it (here in the form of the bullet) and withstand readers, who like "bluebottles" (213; flies that breed on decaying organic matter) devour its subjects, is contestable. The novel thus poses a series of questions to literature: to whom does literature belong once it is written; does anyone care what it says; will it ever be heard against violence and through consumption?

In considering these questions about the function of literature and its relationship to the political and historical record, Spivak is again useful. She writes "I must keep imagining and presuming a challenge *to* history[...] I must keep telling myself that history tells us what happened and fiction what may have happened and indeed may happen" ("The New Subaltern" 337). Literature offers a space in which to think through possibilities that are available but have perhaps not been activated; it allows a mode within which to practice new ways of thinking and imagine phenomena for which preconditions are still coalescing. Literature may thus function as a way to narrate uncertainty, and as such it requires a particular kind of reading. According to Spivak the "reading of fiction" involves "learning from the singular and unverifiable" (338). Rather than cataloging literary narrative as historical evidence that plots political violence as trauma within the archive, it is useful to read fiction in a way that acknowledges the particularities of individual stories and allows for uncertainty.

In this chapter I set out to learn what function literature might have in relation to the archive and political reality in post-apartheid South Africa. My analysis of the way that Dulcie, the singular and unverifiable, figures in *David's Story*, has demonstrated both

the challenges and the potential of literature that endeavors to narrate uncertain political realities without foreclosing unknown possibilities. In the next chapter I analyze the way that selected works from the Caribbean address the paradox of challenging an imperial power network by using a language and literary form that has been integral to its historical formation. I show not only how these texts narrate economic and cultural imperialism, but also how they resist a literary humanitarian reading that reduces individuals from the Caribbean to symbols of imperial oppression.

CHAPTER FOUR

Narrating Transnational Identity and Remapping the Postcolonial in Three Caribbean Texts

In the previous chapters I have shown that treating armed conflict and physical endangerment in the postcolony as a human rights concern depoliticizes violence and suffering and detracts attention from its underlying causes. This chapter focuses on the economic and cultural imperialism that characterize the postcolonial condition. It asks how the problematics of narrating postcoloniality intersect with a human rights discourse that has come to govern articulations of injustice. Literary humanitarianism interprets the inequalities that result from economic and cultural imperialism as a human rights concern and attempts to join the exploited masses of the postcolony with international humanitarian readers. One of the fundamental problems with interpreting the postcolonial condition as a human rights concern is that the 'universal' subject of human rights is always already a national subject, and the socioeconomic crises that need to be addressed in the postcolony are transnational.

In addition to histories of colonialism, inequitable global development policies and the growth of transnational capital have resulted in the exploitation of the national subject in many post-independence states. The contemporary human rights movement attempts to rescue the national subject by imagining the 'universal' human in its place and asserting a moral code. Because the political possibilities for this 'universal' subject continue to be structured by the state, the globalization of a moral code is really a way to

fortify the national subject while attempting to remain neutral about the global socioeconomic inequalities that undermine the well-being of this subject.

Rather than recognize how colonialism and postcoloniality have produced subjects who are neither defined nor protected by the nation, literary humanitarianism supports the globalization of ethical ideals that promise to rehabilitate the national subject. In an effort to achieve rights for those around the world who face injustices, it deploys a testimonial narrative structure. The assumption is that testimony not only offers catharsis to resolve the traumatic effects of slavery and colonialism, but also that it provides evidence that those who suffer from injustices in the post-independence state deserve what Hannah Arendt terms "the right to have rights" (294).[86] Because the right to have rights is tied to the state, literary humanitarianism requires individuals to narrate themselves in a way that is legible to the state in order to prove their eligibility for rights. As literary humanitarianism attempts to defend the 'universal' human against the 'inhuman' evils that threaten the national subject, it commits epistemic violence by imposing a rigid narrative framework that does not allow for transnational articulations of the postcolonial condition. Literary humanitarianism's focus on saving the national subject from post-independence states obscures global inequalities, and it suppresses complex identities that have formed through diasporas and displacements related to slavery, colonialism, and postcoloniality.

I read Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988), Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990) in order to ask how contemporary literature might interrupt the dominant discourse of human rights and unhinge appeals for international justice from the 'proper' development of national citizen-subjects. As these

texts negotiate the paradox of challenging an imperial regime by using a language and literary form that was integral to its historical formation, they exhibit the complications of counteracting normative, developmental narratives that sustain global inequalities. Kincaid addresses this paradox as she comments on the way that "millions of people," through the slave trade and British colonization, were "made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground[...] and worst and most painful of all, no tongue" (31). She remarks, "isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed this crime?" (31). Through its particular lexicon, grammatical logic, and canonical narratives, language provides a rubric for ontological understanding, and it structures forms of expression. Kincaid, Walcott, and Cliff are part of a legacy of Caribbean writers who self-consciously reappropriate the English language and its literary forms to challenge epistemic violence as they move in and across the Caribbean, England, Africa, and the Americas.[87] As human rights discourse increasingly regiments the way that injustice is represented and addressed, I look to this tradition to identify alternative narrative strategies through which literature may represent the inequalities of the postcolonial condition.

As transnational writers whose work is claimed within multiple literary fields from Caribbean to American to Commonwealth and Anglophone literature, Kincaid, Walcott, and Cliff complicate the neat categorization of national identity. They have each been scrutinized for their privileged positions as immigrant writers in part because their work often self-consciously comments on the ethical complications of representing their respective island homes from within the US academy and the international publishing

industry that supports them. Rather than pursuing the overdue promises of postcolonial nationalist projects or rights-based identity politics, Kincaid, Walcott, and Cliff reveal that neither national citizenship (in Antigua, Jamaica, and St. Lucia, respectively), nor universal humanism offer protection from exploitation on the global market. *A Small Place*, *No Telephone to Heaven*, and *Omeros* remap postcoloniality according to the networks of transnational capital that structure it and the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that discipline its subjects. As these works show how colonial history, inequitable postcolonial 'development,' and contemporary economic and cultural imperialism produce transnational subjects, they undermine imposed binaries like native and tourist, male and female, and Old and New World. Such binaries constitute the split subject of the 'universal' human.[88] I consider not only how these texts challenge the transnational power networks that human rights discourse masks, but also what happens to 'the human' in these narratives as it becomes transnational.

I first show how *A Small Place* illustrates a significant aspect of the postcolonial condition that literary humanitarianism overlooks. Kincaid's text shows that being human and being a national citizen in the postcolony does not deliver equal rights because economic and cultural imperialism put the postcolonial subject into the service of transnational capital. The narrative calls attention to the inequitable power structure that extends from the historical relationship between master and slave to the contemporary dynamic between tourist and native. As the text critiques the divide between native Antiguans who experience various forms of oppression and tourists who consume fantasies of Antigua that elide structural inequalities, it refuses literary humanitarian readers accommodations similar to those that tourists enjoy. After analyzing Kincaid's

critique of the postcolonial condition, I examine how *No Telephone to Heaven* exposes the limits of rights-based movements that attempt to empower national subjects through identity politics. Featuring characters that do not fit within racial and gender categories, this novel explores what happens when postcolonial subjects come up against the limits of both personal and national sovereignty. While the novel acknowledges that revolution becomes an imperative at such junctures, it also compels its reader to question what revolution will look like in the contemporary postcolony where, despite independence and resignification, imperial structures persist. Through my reading of Walcott's *Omeros*, I identify possibilities for rethinking a human-centered, rights-based representation of postcoloniality. The landscape that this epic poem depicts cannot be contained within national borders, explained in terms of a rift between divided worlds, or expressed from the perspective of the 'universal human' subject. I propose a posthumanist reading of *Omeros* in order to show how the text ultimately frees its characters from the identity politics that *No Telephone to Heaven* problematizes. Together these texts demonstrate not only how transnational identities are transforming the contemporary literary field,[89] but also how such identities exceed the limiting categories that contemporary human rights discourse imposes.

Kincaid's *A Small Place* surveys the sociopolitical and economic landscape of late nineteen eighties Antigua, a nine by twelve mile island that was a British colony until 1967 (it then became an associated state of the UK) and gained independence from Britain in 1981. Tinged with irony, the text is a long essay written in short, simple clauses that together read like a fable. Its sarcastic tone is at once humorous and assertive in its honesty. The storybook-like nonfiction narrative is told in four parts – a tourist's view, a

recollection of colonial Antigua, a depiction of postcolonial Antigua, and a reflection on what it is like to be Antiguan. It thus provides a useful introduction to the political and economic reality of postcoloniality in the Caribbean.

The text is provocative because, rather than allowing its imagined reader to interpret its representation of the postcolony as a literary humanitarian, it identifies its reader by way of his or her socioeconomic relationship to Antigua as a potential tourist. It opens by describing the perspective typical of the reader that it addresses, beginning, "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" (Kincaid 3). As the text directs itself to "you," the tourist, it immediately implicates the reader in the critique that will follow. *A Small Place* exposes the disparity between the tourist's view and the lived reality of Antiguans, and it refuses to allow "you," the tourist and reader, the luxury of an illusion that permits structural inequalities to go unquestioned. By calling the reader out as a potential tourist, the text prevents the literary humanitarian from invoking a fantasy of universal humanism to reconcile his or her own privilege with the exploitation of the natives in this narrative. Instead the text details how the tourist's view of Antigua is obstructed by his or her own desires and advantages (the latter of which are often unbeknownst to him or her).

Moving step-by-step through the tourist's experience of Antigua (all the while maintaining the direct address of "you" to the reader), *A Small Place* describes the impression tourists have of a place like Antigua versus the reality of this place and of the postcolonial condition itself. The narrative shows how limited the tourist's perspective is noting, "You may be the sort of tourist who would wonder why a Prime Minister would want an airport named after him – why not a school, why not a hospital, why not some

great public monument? You are a tourist and you have not yet seen a school in Antigua, you have not yet seen the hospital in Antigua, you have not yet seen a public monument in Antigua" (3). As is immediately implied here and elaborated on throughout the narrative, the priority in Antigua is placed on international tourism at the expense of the country's own social infrastructure. The tourist's interest coupled with this lack of awareness about such structural inequality bears similarity to the literary humanitarian's superficial concern and inattention to structural problems. *A Small Place* suggests that the way in which the tourist is valued at the expense of Antigua's inhabitants encourages the tourist's delight in things such as the "deliciously hot and dry" climate and his or her ignorance of the fact that this place "suffers constantly from drought" (4). It also facilitates the tourist's mobility: "Since you are a tourist, a North American or European – to be frank, white – and not an Antiguan black returning to Antigua from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives, you move through customs swiftly, you move through customs with ease. Your bags are not searched" (4–5). The international tourist is allowed to move with ease in and out of spaces within which the national subject is restricted and policed. The state privileges the free movement of capital in the form of tourists' dollars, and it restricts its own national citizens' ability to freely participate in the exchange of "much needed" (4) goods. While the tourist is liberated by the global economy, the native is more severely taxed by it.

The text clarifies that one is not inherently either a tourist or a native, calling attention to the fact that

> every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing

> banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives – most natives in the world – cannot go anywhere (18).

There is no essentialist difference between a tourist and a native – their difference is in the inequitable social, political, and economic structures to which they are subject within the web of global power networks. The mobility that the tourist enjoys allows this person to escape the limited purview of day-to-day life and redefine a banal existence against the difference of an Other. In contrast to those natives who are "too poor to escape the reality of their lives[... and] too poor to live properly in the place where they live" (19), the tourist is encouraged to feel uninhibited, especially in a place like Antigua that caters to tourists at the expense of its inhabitants. As the tourist's right to mobility as well as rest and leisure comes up against the native's right to an adequate standard of living, the limitations of a rights-based system are exposed.[90] Of the native who is never able to be a tourist, the text explains, "they envy your ability to turn their banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself" (19). By addressing its critique to the reader as tourist, *A Small Place* challenges the reader to acknowledge his or her own socioeconomic relationship to Antiguans. Furthermore, as the text clarifies that the native and the tourist are not essentialist categories, it ensures that the reader does not translate its statement that "every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere" (18) into a universal humanist resolution. It reminds the reader that although particular experiences or aspirations may be universal, the lives of individual humans are structured by inequitable socioeconomic and political realities.

Through its analysis of the tourist, *A Small Place* also exposes the inclination to justify one's own privilege. The text acknowledges, "A tourist is an ugly human being.

You are not an ugly person all the time" (14), but "since you are being an ugly person this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you: their ancestors were not clever in the way yours were and not ruthless in the way yours were, for then would it not be you who would be in harmony with nature and backwards in that charming way" (17). A humanist conception of the world naturalizes the ascendancy of humans over other forms of life and it allows for Social Darwinist thinking, which suggests there is a ladder of civilization on which some humans distinguish themselves from others by distancing themselves from "nature." *A Small Place* suggests that privileging tourists and marketing Antiguans as a "charming" (17) attraction allows tourists to imagine Antiguans on the low end of a developmental ladder that they see themselves as having already ascended. By pointing this out to a reader who has already been identified as a potential tourist, the text challenges the reader to acknowledge the socioeconomic sources of his or her privilege rather than fall back on the faulty (and shameful) logic of the developmental narrative that it has just undermined.

This developmental narrative also suggests that Antigua should mature as a nation according to the model of wealthier nations. In response, *A Small Place* challenges the assumption that the accumulation of capital is an appropriate measure of a nation's welfare. It suggests that features such as Antigua's standing army, Minister of Culture, and postage stamps are duplicitous performances of a nation that serves multinational capital at the expense of its citizens. Kincaid questions the role of the standing army in Antigua as she remarks, "And though this army cannot really fight a war, is not trained to really fight a war – Antigua, after all, has no enemies – the men in this army can shoot at people, and if they cannot fight a war but can shoot at people, what people will they shoot

at?" (72–3).[91] According to the text, this army does not exist to protect the people of the nation from outside threats. Instead, it polices the people of the nation in order to guard its international financial interests. These interests are in part reliant on an international tourist industry that profits from Antiguan people's labor and their marketability as "charming" (17) attractions.

Rather than investing in domestic infrastructure to ensure the well being of the Antiguan people, the tourist industry cultivates a façade that appeals to visitors seeking escape from their own lives. Kincaid implies that the purpose of Antigua's Minister of Culture is to project a desirable image of Antigua. She suggests, "In countries that have no culture or are afraid they may have no culture there is a Minister of Culture" (49). The text insinuates that this minister constructs and regulates the people's culture in order to display it for tourists eager to consume a particular idea of Antiguan 'culture.' The hollow representation of this 'culture' is evident in the country's postage stamps. Kincaid considers how these stamps reveal the state's loyalties, and she wonders, "who decides to print stamps celebrating the Queen of England's birthday? Who decides to celebrate Mickey Mouse's birthday? Who decides that stamps from this part of the world should be colourful and bright and not sedate and subdued, like, say, a stamp from Canada?" (51–2). Kincaid not only asks who controls the representation of Antigua but also reveals how superficial the image of the nation is. The two honorees she mentions are representative of the British Empire that once ruled Antigua and the US-controlled foreign powers that continue to challenge its sovereignty. The first is a member of the English monarchy that dominated the country through colonialism and the other is a cartoon icon of cultural imperialism. Antigua itself is only referenced by the "colourful and bright" (52) tones of

the stamps, which evoke superficial images of the island scenery that would be of interest to a visitor seeking escape from his or her own "sedate and subdued" life as a native of some other place.

Ultimately *A Small Place* reveals that neither anti-colonial nationalism nor universal humanism addresses the inequality of a global hierarchy structured by transnational capital. The narrative shows that citizenship does not guarantee rights in a state that puts the people of the nation in a position of subservience to global financial interests. What is more, by highlighting the reader's complicity in economic and cultural imperialism, the text refuses a humanitarian response to the inequalities it illustrates. In its conclusion it exposes the 'universal' human as a construct that masks the socioeconomic disparities between the tourist and native. Kincaid suggests that the relationship between tourist and native has its historical antecedent in the master-slave dialectic, in which the authority of the master is defined by the subjugation of the slave and vice versa. Noting that "all masters of every stripe are rubbish, and all slaves of every stripe are noble and exalted" (80), she ends her narrative by remarking, "Of course, the whole thing is, once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings" (81). The "descendants" (80) of the masters and the slaves are just human beings, and as such they continue to relate to each other through a relationship of imperialism. As human beings, the people of Antigua – "the descendants of those noble and exalted people, the slaves" (80–1) – are exploited by their own state and by the global financial interests that they are made to serve. Thus,

neither being human nor being a national citizen put an end to global inequality.[92] Responding to injustices by invoking universal humanism or calling for postcolonial 'development' are empty gestures that ignore the economic and cultural imperialism that persists in the postcolony.

While Kincaid's *A Small Place* illuminates the way that contemporary imperialism operates, Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* exhibits the challenges that postcolonial subjects face not only in negotiating the various narratives that define their seemingly fragmented identities but also as they come up against the limits of identity politics in their attempts to counteract imperialism. *No Telephone to Heaven* hints at the complexity of identity and representation in the postcolony by beginning with a brief glossing of the Jamaican term "ruinate." Used to describe second growth forests in which bush has reoccupied previously cleared land, ruinate is also an appropriate term to apply to this postcolonial narrative, which is itself a tangled and disorderly palimpsest. Cliff precedes nearly every chapter in *No Telephone to Heaven* with epigraphs that span Yoruba hymns, Jamaican proverbs, and the works of writers as different as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Aimé Césaire. She also embeds references to texts ranging from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to the *New York Times* travel section. The novel not only overlays its numerous intertextual references with its own narrative, but it also rejects a linear timeline and arranges its fragmented narrative strands in a sporadic and overlapping configuration. The text's disorienting narrative structure interrupts the normative conventions of the postcolonial development novel. It refuses to contain its character's identities within rights-based categories and allows the controversy it depicts to spill out beyond the book's covers. Rather than symbolically resolving the problems of

the postcolonial condition by book's end through a linear story about its main character Clare Savage's journey toward revolution, it offers an unruly narrative that twists around on itself and leaves the reader feeling entirely unsettled about the possibilities for either a literary or a political revolution in the postcolony.

In the first scene of the frame narrative a group of people, including Clare (though not named at this point) and her friend Harriet (called "Harry/Harriet" throughout the text) are in the back of a truck ascending the mountainous Jamaican terrain on a winding road edged by ruinate forest. The identities of the people in the truck remain unknown, but they wear uniform-like clothes that they have sourced through channels that evoke their colonial history and current economic dependency. The text describes them "dressed in similar clothes, which became them as uniforms, signifying some agreement, some purpose – that they were in something together" (Cliff 4). Though their objective remains vague, it can be gleaned from this opening sketch that this group is putting their second- and third-hand uniforms to use for a new purpose. Many of them wear khaki, a material that was once "spun to outfit the empire" (6) and which some have been enshrouded in before as school children, gardeners, laborers, distillery workers, and cane-cutters. Others "wore discarded American army fatigues, stolen from white kids high on dope, plugged into machines sending our music into their heads, sleepyheads, on the beach" (6). Worn by American "sleepyheads" in Jamaica for music festivals like "Sunsplash" and "Jamfest" (6), these fatigues signal the apathetic rebellion of privileged American youths armed with nothing but "one of Papa's credit cards" (6). The repeated resignification of this clothing hints at the various channels of political, economic, and cultural imperialism through which such uniforms make it onto the backs of the people in the truck.

In addition to the repurposed khakis and the pilfered fatigues, the group shares a small collection of camouflage jackets, each with a "soldier's name still taped to the breast pocket" (7). Despite the impracticality of such jackets in the Jamaican heat, there is an insistence that the jackets signal the authenticity of the group. The text illustrates the complexities of this assumption as it describes,

> The camouflage jackets, names and all, added a further awareness, a touch of realism, cinematic verité, that anyone who eyed them would believe they were faced with *real* soldiers. True soldiers – though no government had ordered them into battle – far from it. But this is how the camouflage made them feel. As the gold and green and black knitted caps some wore – a danger because the bright gold would sing out in the bush – made them feel like real freedom fighters, like their comrades in the ANC – a cliché, almost screenplayed to death, *Viva Zapata!* And all that – but that *is* what they were, what they *felt* they were, what they *were* in fact (7).

Though some wear the colors of the Jamaican flag, these are not "*real* soldiers" (7), for they have the authority of "no government" (7). Donning these camouflage jackets with others names on them, they project an image for an outside viewer that may or may not correspond to who they really are. They "feel like real freedom fighters" (7), like those in the African National Congress (ANC) that fought against apartheid in South Africa. Yet, there is an element of pastiche here as the text acknowledges how they act out clichéd images that have been "screenplayed to death" (7). It becomes unclear whether they are comrades in a revolutionary movement that extends across the African diaspora or if they are mere imitations of revolutionaries like those in the 1952 Hollywood film *Viva Zapata!* starring Marlon Brando as Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. The confirmation that the text provides when it states "but that *is* what they were, what they *felt* they were, what they *were* in fact" only makes their identities more ambiguous as the text fluctuates between vague, clichéd descriptions.

Though the novel explains that the people on this truck are "making something new" (5), and they certainly seem to be on a critical mission, the particularities of their undertaking are not immediately clear. Perhaps this is because revolutionary agendas have so often been tied to a rights-based idea of identity, and both individually and as a group these people on the truck are indefinable within any consistent identity category. The text describes the differences among them, observing,

> the shades of their skin, places traveled to and from, events experienced, things understood, food taken into their bodies, acts of violence committed, books read, music heard, languages recognized, ones they loved, living family, varied widely, came between them. That was all to be expected of course—that on this island, as part of this small nation, many of them would have been separated at birth. Automatically. Slipped into places where to escape would mean taking your life into your own hands. Not more, not less. Where to get out would mean crashing through barriers positioned by people not so unlike yourself (4-5).

The people in the truck do not appear to share a singular ethnicity, culture, or body of experience. Though they are "part of this small nation" (4), they are not united by way of the nation.[93] In fact, as part of this nation they have been "separated" (4) from each other as if this stratification is part of what defines the nation. Perhaps they have come together now in an effort to "escape" (4) the oppressive conditions to which they have been subjected by "crashing through barriers" (5). In one way or another each of these people do not fit into prescribed identities. The story that follows this opening scene studies how Clare struggles against the oppressive identity categories that define the postcolonial condition. It undermines the binary logic that suggests light-skinned Clare must be either white or black and her transgendered friend Harry/Harriet must be either male or female. But, Clare and Harry/Harriet are not simply in a fight for their identities; as a part of the group in the truck they are also searching for a way of "reaching out or up" (16) to break out of the oppressive system that sustains inequality and injustice in the postcolony. The

novel is so provocative, because rather than representing the activism of the group in the truck as a way to embrace universal humanism and redeem the Jamaican underclass, it considers how two of the truck's passengers, Clare and Harriet, come up against the limits of both personal and national sovereignty in their struggle against the postcolonial condition.

Picking up where Cliff's first novel *Abeng* left off with Clare's story, *No Telephone to Heaven* details what life is like for Clare after she moves in 1960 at age fourteen with her family from her childhood home in Jamaica to New York. Clare's mother Kitty returns to Jamaica shortly after this, taking Clare's younger sister Jennie and leaving Clare with her father Boy who is determined to pass as white. The story follows Clare as she struggles with her sense of self throughout high school and college in the US, and it remarks on Kitty's death in Jamaica when Clare is twenty. It then accompanies Clare, who "with the logic of a creole" (109) transplants herself to "the mother-country" (109). She eventually attends graduate school in London until she meets Bobby, a wounded African-American deserter from the army, with whom she travels around Europe. After Clare has a miscarriage, probably due to the Agent Orange Bobby was exposed to in the Vietnam War, they separate and she moves back to Jamaica. The story progresses (though not in chronological order) until it catches up with the frame narrative at which point Clare is thirty-six. With the encouragement of her friend Harry/Harriet, she has moved back to Jamaica, reclaimed her grandmother's farm, and now lives on the land with the group in the truck that people call "NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN" (106).

As Clare moves between Jamaica, the US, and England, the novel highlights the effect that a history of colonialism and continued postcolonial subjugation have on her sense of self. In the US Clare learns that her mixed racial identity is an unwelcome complication. Boy deals with the racism that he encounters in the US by attempting to pass as white. He denies Clare's and his mixed racial identities and "counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage" (100). Clare's ability to blend in is tested when Boy enrolls her in a New York City high school. The school principal takes issue with Clare's racial makeup and reinforces the color line as she admonishes, "we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens" (99). Thus Clare is taught by both her father – who contends that she is white – and this representative of the US educational system – who classifies her as black – that she must efface part of herself in order to be recognized. This strict categorization denies her very existence and requires that she either be white or black, for these demarcations are perceived as distinguishing fundamentally opposite types of people. What is more, the principal's concern over Clare's race is part of a larger conversation in which she maintains that even though Clare has had extensive training in multiple languages, advanced math, and classical literature, she should be enrolled in a lower grade because her education up to this point has taken place in Jamaica. The principal claims, "We are professional educators here. We are talking about degrees of emotional development. Children develop differently. Children from underdeveloped countries develop at a different rate than American children" (98). The principal reinforces a hierarchy that renders "underdeveloped" countries, namely the former colonies, inferior. She also insinuates that Clare's uncertain racial identity is a symptom

of Jamaica's "underdevelopment" and suggests that Clare would be more properly developed within a "system" that allows for no "in-betweens" (99).

The novel critiques this logic of development and essentialist classification by including passages that parody the anthropological narrative style through which the (post)colonial subject is dehumanized. Clare is described as

> The albino gorilla moving through the underbrush. Hiding from the poachers who would claim her and crush her in a packing crate against the darker ones offended by her pelt[...] She cowers in the bush fearing capture[...] Not speaking for years. Not feeling much of anything, except a vague dread that she belongs nowhere[...] She does not gather branches to braid into a nest. She moves. Emigrated, lone travel, the zoologist would have recorded (91).

Assuming the tone of scientific field notes, this passage satirizes the way that Clare is marked as abnormal – even "offens[ive]" (91) – for not fitting into the standard system of racial classification. Having been taught to camouflage parts of herself, she avoids exposure by moving. This continual evasion consumes all of her energy, and hiding parts of herself becomes the defining part of her identity.

Perhaps this is why Clare feels a special kinship with Harry/Harriet who is born "[n]ot just sun, but sun and moon" (128). Early on the novel explains, "everyone tolerates him, as if measuring their normalness against his strangeness" (21). But Clare, in her difference, identifies with Harry/Harriet. In one of their conversations she reflects, "No, I don't find you strange. No stranger… no stranger than I find myself. For we are neither one thing nor the other" (131). Drawing strength from Harry/Harriet, Clare stops camouflaging herself. And yet, even as she is beginning to embrace her difference, it seems that these two will ultimately be forced to conform to one or the other side of their split identities. For, even Harry/Harriet remarks, "I mean the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make the choice. Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in

this world" (131). The rigid boundaries of racial and gender categories in this world demand conformity, and Clare and Harry/Harriet find that rather than empowering them, identity politics limit their subjectivity. Furthermore, when Harriet makes a choice and announces to Clare, "Harriet live and Harry be no more" (168), it becomes clear that she has been shunned for transgressing gender norms. She comes up against the limit of sexual rights, and perhaps as a result finds herself on the truck in the frame narrative with a group of people who have "[s]lipped into places where to escape would mean taking your life into your own hands" (4). Together, this group in the truck has decided to take life in Jamaica into their own hands.

For Harriet the first part of such a process to take her life into her own hands is to establish authority over her own identity, even if others are not willing to accept the identity she inhabits. Her struggle to do this is tied up with the violation that she experienced as a young boy. She shares with Clare,

> I have been tempted all of my life to think *symbol* – that what he did to me is but a symbol for what they did to us, always bearing in mind that some of us, many of us, also do it to each other. But that's not right. I only suffered what my mother suffered – no more, no less. Not symbol, not allegory, not something in a story or a dialogue by Plato. No, man, I am merely a person who felt the overgrown cock of a big whiteman pierce the asshole of a lickle Black bwai – there it is. That is all there is to it (130).

This refusal to exist only as a representation of a history of violent oppression is indicative of the novel's self-consciousness as a literary form and its refusal to frame Harry/Harriet's identity in terms of trauma. This is, after all, not a testimonial narrative. The novel directly confronts the reader's inclination to think "symbol" or "allegory," and reminds the reader that addressing historical violence is more complex than simply

representing Harry/Harriet's traumatic personal violation and celebrating the way that he/she might overcome it by sharing this story.

However, establishing ownership over one's identity is only one aspect of taking one's life into one's own hands. While political movements based on identity have been important for establishing rights for individuals and groups who have been discriminated against on the basis of their racial, gender, or sexual identities, these rights-based movements have their limits. In *No Telephone to Heaven* Clare and Harriet find not only that they do not fit into the identity categories within which people have fought for rights, but also widespread inequality and injustice still persist in Jamaica despite the agendas set out by nationalist politicians and international black power and feminist activists. There is a whole substratum of people who are asked to endure their poverty and have faith that the promises of such movements will materialize. *No Telephone to Heaven* takes a closer look at those people who cannot escape a life of continued servitude, hunger, illness, and destitution. It explains that these people are "tired of praying for those that persecute them" (17), and it confronts the possibility that there is "NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. No voice to God. A waste to try. Cut off. No way of reaching out or up. Maybe only one way. Not God's way. No matter if him is Jesus or him is Jah. Him not gwan like dis one lickle bit. NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN" (16). The novel not only explores the complexities of Clare and Harriet's identities but also illustrates the hopelessness, anger, and violence that the postcolonial condition produces.

Though the novel focuses in large part on how Clare, "A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners" (5), ends up "on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her" (5), structurally the text foregrounds what it is like for those people,

unlike Clare, who have "no way of reaching out or up" (16). Clare's story is scattered throughout the text, revealing how tangential her development actually is to the novel's central concern. In fact, a full explanation of her life is delayed in order to detail how a poor young boy named Christopher becomes a disgruntled "yardbwai" (46) who goes mad and murders his employer's family and a fellow servant. Compared to Christopher who grows up with bones bent from hunger in a shantytown called "the Dungle[...] the dung-heap jungle" (32), Clare is a privileged dreamer who has the luxury of fretting over an identity crisis. The novel spends a good deal of time depicting the hardship and frustration that Christopher experiences as well as the brutality of the murders that he commits and the mad haze within which he wanders for the remainder of his life. It then depicts how Clare, who has for most of her life remained disconnected from underprivileged Jamaicans, becomes involved in a revolutionary movement that takes up the issues of Jamaica's poor. While the novel shows how Clare grows to embrace the Jamaican ancestry that she was once denied, it does not portray Clare as a savior for her people.

Christopher's story epitomizes the tragedy of so many inequitable (post)colonial policies and failed promises to uplift the people of the postcolony. By the end of the novel – in the time of the frame narrative – Christopher is known as "de watchman of downtown" (179). He is a "legend" (179), mythologized by a reggae singer whose lyrics intone, "Him call fe bu'n. Bu'n de damn t'ing down. Bu'n all Jamaica downtown. People say him mad, dem say him clown, but de truth will come when we bu'n de fockin' place down" (179). Thus, the violence to which he resorts when he feels utterly trapped by his unending poverty and dependence is romanticized and invoked as a rally cry. To others

he has become something so destructive and unstable that he is seemingly inhuman. In the last pages of the novel, he is hired on a movie set by Hollywood filmmakers who cast him as Sasabonsam – a fabled West African forest creature that hides in trees and attacks hunters. The filmmakers interpret his dreadlocked "hair, the look in [his] eyes" (205) as animalistic and instruct him to change nothing about his appearance. While "edg[ing] back as far" as possible from his "stench" (205), they request that he howl for them to demonstrate just how inhuman he can be. And, when coaching him in his scene, the director advises, "Remember, you're not human" (207). Whether mythologized in a reggae song "played in Brixton" (179) – a Caribbean enclave of London – or captured howling in a Hollywood movie, Christopher becomes an object of consumption. He becomes a canned image of either rebellion or degeneration, and in both cases the realities of his life in the Dungle and his brutal killing spree are completely eclipsed.

As the novel problematizes such simplistic perceptions of Christopher as either a revolutionary icon or an inhuman monster, it reveals the complexity not only of the postcolonial condition but also of attempts to combat it. Throughout the narrative there is a troubling association between the brutal murders that Christopher commits in a mad rage and the militancy of those in the truck. The moment before Christopher slaughters an entire family along with his fellow servant the novel reveals, "A force passed through him. He had no past. He had no future. He was phosphorus. Light-bearing. He was light igniting the air around him. The source of all danger. He was the carrier of fire. He was the black light that rises from bone ash" (47). This fiery imagery bears a disturbing similarity to the rhetoric of the group in the truck who have determined that "[t]hey must turn the damn thing upside down. Fight fire with fire. Burn. Yes, burn it down" (50).

There is a recognition within this group that revolution means not simply fighting for rights for one identity group or another in order to reorganize the global hierarchy but rather fundamentally changing the inequitable system that supports such a hierarchy. Yet, by showing the similarities between this group's potential actions and Christopher's gruesome acts, the novel refuses to idealize the revolution for which they are calling.

The link between the violence that Christopher inflicts and the violence that the group on the truck sets out to cause, as well as the vague descriptions of the group on the truck, raise important questions about what this group's revolution will look like. Aside from destruction, what is the logic of this revolution? Furthermore, by what channels will this revolution be possible? Organizing around a particular identity group – whether based on race, gender, sex, or nationality – leads to the reshuffling of power within the same inequitable system. Clare and Harriet know all too well the exclusions that identity politics reinforce. They have come up against the limits of personal sovereignty in a world that doesn't allow for them to live split between the binaries that it imposes. Furthermore, as part of a militant group that has the authority of "no government" (7), they are not invoking the nation as a revolutionary structure. The authority of the nation has been undermined to the point that their country's army is deployed not on behalf of the nation but for the protection of the foreign movie crew that has hired Christopher to howl in a tree ("[r]emember, you're not human" (207), they tell him). As it turns out the group in the truck is on a mission to overtake this movie set, but someone has given them up. The group, including Clare and Harriet, is attacked by the army while the Hollywood movie crew waits in their trailers for this disruption to be neutralized. Clearly the sovereignty of the nation has been compromised by its investment in international capital,

but does this also mean that Clare and Harriet have risked their lives – possibly lost their lives – in an attempt to interrupt the filming of a movie? The absurdity of this scenario reflects the senseless inequalities that define the postcolonial condition.

No Telephone to Heaven explores the difficulty of "crashing through barriers" (5) that have been set out by the dominant power when only the tools conceived of by this power are available. It suggests that such a scenario requires revolution, but it questions what might occur in the moment of revolution as well as what might come after. In the instant when Christopher revolts, becoming "the carrier of fire" (47), he feels as if he has stepped outside of a linear temporality – as if "[h]e had no past. He had no future" (47). Thus, the novel suggests that in the moment of "fight[ing] fire with fire" (50), there is a certain timelessness. But, what comes out of this isolated moment? Does it bring about pure destruction as it seems to do with Christopher, or might it produce something else? Though the group in the truck fails to enact revolution and is actually shot down by its own country's army, the novel itself invokes its own revolutionary moment. The novel has been using the language and literary form of its (post)colonial masters, and it has been attempting to interrupt the narrative conventions of the postcolonial development novel. On its last page though it seems to follow through on the call for revolution by turning language itself "upside down" (50) and invoking an epistemological breakdown. Words collapse into themselves on this page so that the meaning and authority of the linguistic sign disintegrates. This linguistic explosion encourages the isolation of the signifier – the sound-image – in order to imagine the emancipatory quality of time out of time. In the moment when the sign is obliterated, when words degenerate into pure sound, there is an opportunity for originality. Thus, the seemingly tragic ending of the

novel may be read either as a moment of destruction or possibility. In the conclusion the reader is suspended in a space of anxiety, unsure if this is an ending or a beginning, if this is a literary apocalypse or if when "[d]ay broke" (208) there occurred a sort of rupture that perhaps allowed for the emergence of a form of justice that is yet unimaginable.

No Telephone to Heaven questions the ways in which revolution in the postcolony has devolved into stealing army fatigues from tourists, attacking movie crews, calling for an absolute breakdown of language, and other various forms of "fight[ing] fire with fire" (50). As the novel's characters defy various social and legal boundaries, they are continually dehumanized (Clare as an albino gorilla and Christopher as Sasabonsam, for instance). The novel not only features dehumanized characters whose fragmented identities expose the limitations of rights-based movements, but it also illustrates the desperation that compels them to "fight fire with fire" (50). Like Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, Walcott's *Omeros* also confronts the limitations of identity politics. Walcott's poetry has long contended with the fragmented identity that afflicts the postcolonial subject. Cliff even opens *No Telephone to Heaven* with an excerpt from Walcott's 1965 poem "Laventille," which depicts a people who are divided between conflicting African and English cultures. In *Omeros* Walcott ultimately recognizes that it is necessary to move past representations of the postcolonial condition as a crisis of identity. The text stages the process by which its narrator realizes that plotting human subjects in a narrative according to pre-given identity categories reduces people to symbols and extends their exploitation. While *No Telephone to Heaven* exhibits how the postcolonial subject is dehumanized and how revolution in the postcolony can devolve into self-destruction, *Omeros* reframes the postcolonial condition through a complex network of

imagery and metaphors that allow for a posthumanist reading. Both of these texts illustrate the struggle to break out of imperial structures, but the posthumanist outlook that I identify in *Omeros* reveals possibilities for overcoming the postcolonial condition that remain unavailable in Cliff's novel.

Playing with the idea of inaugurating the St. Lucian version of a Homeric epic, *Omeros* is about the writing process and the writer at first getting stuck in the trap of incorporating characters into a master narrative. The text's narrator is a writer who, like Walcott, shuttles between the northeast of the US and his native St. Lucia. In verse-form he narrates a quasi-epic about two Helens – one, a contemporary St. Lucian woman over whom Achille and Hector fight and the second, the island of St. Lucia itself (known as the "Helen of the West Indies" because it changed hands between British and French colonizers so many times). The narrator's literary project (which comprises the text itself) is matched in the story he tells by the efforts of Major Dennis Plunkett (a retired, Regimental Sergeant in the British army) to excavate a history of St. Lucia. By documenting this history, Plunkett wishes to honor Helen, who is also his and his wife Maude's former housemaid. Plunkett is however, plagued throughout the narrative by a head injury.

Several of the characters in *Omeros* are wounded, and the story initially revolves around the healing of its characters' many wounds. The narrative opens with Philoctete, a fellow fisherman to Achille and sometimes pigpen cleaner on Plunkett's farm, pointing out a scar that is "puckered like the corolla / of a sea-urchin" (Walcott 14).[94] Throughout the narrative, this scar and the other characters' injuries stand in for the wounds of the middle passage, which marks the rift between the Old World and the New World. The

text defies the binary that this presents between Old and New World, and suggests that it is out of the middle passage that contemporary Caribbean identities have been formed. At first, it seems that the text presents the development of these identities in the shadow of their Homeric counterparts in order to validate them and stage a healing process. However, instead of presuming to heal its characters' physical and emotional wounds by way of a testimonial narrative, *Omeros* ultimately takes a cue from the Catholic Church-going, Obeah woman Ma Kilman who intuits a cure for Philoctete's wound. Ma Kilman runs a bar called No Pain Café, but she finds a cure for Philoctete by following a line of ants (also described as "the vine / of the generations of silent black workers" [244]). These ants "lend her / their language" (245), and over the course of the narrative they reveal that each wound "carries its cure" (323). As Ma Kilman opens up her mind to the language of the ants, she breaks out of a human-centered episteme. She is able to locate the cure for Philoctete's wound when she finally sees the world outside of the human constructs (figured here as language) that have previously restricted her sight. The poem challenges the supremacy of a humanist episteme (which divides its characters between Old and New World identities and leaves them wounded) by recognizing that the imperial structures that define their existence are constructs. As *Omeros* breaks down the false boundaries between the natural world and the human world, it undermines the authority of the humanist paradigm through which historical and contemporary imperialism has devalued St. Lucian people.[95]

By showing how the text itself grows out of an accumulation of influences that include not only Western classics and African oral traditions but also the arrangement of natural elements, *Omeros* reveals that writing – along with all other human endeavors – is

part of the natural world rather than distinct from it. Even the rhythm and rhyme of this epic poem are derived from the movement and sound of the sea. Though the author figure is at first preoccupied with Homeric allusions and initially chases after a literary ideal in the form of the epic poem, the answers that seem to elude him become clear once he acknowledges that his writing – and moreover, identity in St. Lucia – is formed out of a complex web of life that includes humans but is not defined by them. In the end the narrator acknowledges that *Omeros* is more than an homage to a shadowy Homeric figure. Certainly, this figure surfaces in the text as a plaster bust and finds a double in the blind "Old St. Omere, " who is known throughout the narrative as Seven Seas for his claims of sailing around the world. Seven Seas even offers sage advice and ushers the narrator through the circles of hell in the manner of Dante. Yet, even after all of these allusions, *Omeros* is not a mere echo of earlier epic poems. It is what its author-figure pronounces it as from the beginning: "I said, 'Omeros,' / and *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was / both mother and sea in our Antillean patois, / *os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes / and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore" (14). The text is an invocation of the sea in which all life is figured as it writes and unwrites existence. As such it offers a posthumanist way of narrating the wounds of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary imperialism that reinvents the epic poem and challenges a human-centered, rights-based episteme.

Omeros is significant not only for the way that it ultimately problematizes the incorporation of the subaltern into master narratives, but also for the imagery through which it illustrates postcoloniality. The text overlays several seemingly separate histories through an intricate use of nature-based metaphors. In doing so it synchronizes elements

that are usually designated binary opposites within an architecture that distinguishes between Old World and New World. Rather than reading *Omeros* in terms of writing back within a binary between the rights and wrongs of colonizer and colonized; civilized and uncivilized; or Western cultural history evidenced in classical texts and indigeneity recovered through Negritude, I suggest that applying a posthumanist lens brings the text's dynamic perspective into focus. *Omeros* demonstrates that existence is more complex than artificial binaries allow and more adaptable than a static historical record and the Western literary canon indicate. The ontology through which it identifies the self is not centered around the human; it sees the human as part of an entire landscape of living things. These life forms interrelate and adapt according to rhythms that are beyond the scope of the 'universal human' and the literary humanitarian narrative structure.

Omeros disallows literary humanitarianism through its critique of the exploitation that tourism extends; its illustration of the complexities through which existence in St. Lucia is defined; and its ultimate recognition that its St. Lucian characters do not require this text to save them. It immediately censures the tourist by opening with Philoctete "smil[ing] for the tourists, who try taking / his soul with their cameras" (3) as he tells them the story of "how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes" (3). What follows in the next several pages is a description of Philoctete and Achille, amongst other fishermen, "working with the same / concentration as an army of fire-ants" (7) to cut down *laurier-cannelles* trees. The intensity of the fishermen at work reflects the gravity of cutting down the "dead god" (6) figured in each tree. After listening to "the ferns nod[...] 'Yes, / the trees have to die" (3), the fishermen "pass the rum" (3) and "pray for strength" (3). The elegy that follows recalls: "The bearded elders endured the decimation / of their tribe

without uttering a syllable[...] while the Aruacs' patois crackled in the smell / of a resinous bonfire that turned the leaves brown / with curling tongues, then ash, and their language was lost[...] The gods were down at last" (6). Though the death of these trees marks the devastating loss of a language, their death is not the end. Next, the verse observes a hopeful reincarnation: as the fishermen, "like ants, trundled them to a cliff[... t]he logs gathered that thirst / for the sea which their own vined bodies were born with. / Now the trunks in eagerness to become canoes / ploughed into breakers of bushes, making raw holes / of boulders, feeling not death inside them, but use – / to roof the sea, to be hulls" (7). Beginning with these scenes of worker ants "cut[ting] down them canoes" (3) and converting "death" into "use" (7), the text deals with irrecoverable loss and shows how life can possibly go on after profound tragedy.

This account of the trees becoming canoes is told in part by Philoctete and then more fully by the narrator. Partway through, before elaborating on the account Philoctete sketches, the narrator describes an exchange that takes place between Philoctete and the group of tourists whom he attracts with his tale. With this interjection, it is as if the text itself, like Philoctete drawing the tourists in, pauses and leans into the reader to offer something worth special attention. In this interlude the narrator first describes the interaction Philoctete has with the tourists, explaining, "For some extra silver, under a sea-almond, / he shows them a scar made by a rusted anchor, / rolling one trouser-leg up with the rising moan / of a conch. It has puckered like the corolla / of a sea-urchin. He does not explain its cure. / 'It have some things' – he smiles – 'worth more than a dollar' (4). Then the narrator explains that rather than selling the cure to "tourists, who try taking / his soul with their cameras" (3), Philoctete

> has left it to a garrulous waterfall / to pour out his secret down La Sorcière, since / the tall laurels fell, for the ground-dove's mating call / to pass on its note to the blue, tacit mountains / whose talkative brooks, carrying it to the sea, / turn into idle pools where the clear minnows shoot / and an egret stalks the reeds with one rusted cry / as it stabs and stabs the mud with one lifting foot. / Then silence is sawn in half by a dragonfly / as eels sign their names along the clear bottom-sand, / when the sunrise brightens the river's memory / and waves of huge ferns are nodding to the sea's sound (4).

Philoctete's decision to "le[ave] it to a garrulous waterfall / to pour out his secret" (4) punctuates the story about the canoes' history as trees and their current life in the ocean waves. By articulating the way that nature adapts and carries with it everything there is to know, this passage emphasizes the point of the story about the trees-become-canoes. It indicates that the reader should pay particular attention to the animal and plant life, earthly elements, and the larger natural environment within which existence is defined for those human characters in the text. Following the waterfall, which runs down the mountain from which the trees have been cut, out to the sea where "waves of huge ferns are nodding to the sea's sound" (4), reveals the unforeseen interconnections through which life occurs, changes, and adapts. After all, these ferns carry the secret poured down by the waterfall, and as they nod to the rhythm of the sea they echo those ferns in the mountains that Philoctete has said "sound like the sea that feed us / fishermen all our life" (3) as they "nod[...] 'Yes, / the trees have to die'" (3). The trees have died to become canoes, and once "their nodding prows / agreed with the waves to forget their lives as trees; / one would serve Hector and another, Achilles" (8).[96] Like so many of the other traumatic injuries that *Omeros* features, the wound of the massacred trees "carries its own cure" (323); the canoes that enable the fisherman to feed their people would not exist without the death of the trees. Perhaps providing such a dense thicket of imagery is a circuitous way to communicate its insights, but like Philoctete, the text will not simply

exchange its secrets with a reader who engages its characters and the island of St. Lucia with the cursory, self-interested glance of a tourist.

The reader will have to move slowly through complex verse, layers of allusion, and a network of seeming contradictions to understand a narrative guided by ocean rhythms. Ultimately this reader will be asked to accept that "the sea had never known / any of them, nor had the illiterate rocks[...] the ocean had / no memory of the wanderings of Gilgamesh, / or whose sword severed whose head in the *Iliad.* / It was an epic where every line was erased / yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf / in that blind violence with which one crest replaced / another with a trench" (295–6). More than simply denaturalizing the reign of Western civilization, *Omeros* suggests that humans as a species are not the center of all life, which is easily "erased" and "freshly written in sheets of exploding surf" (296). Though literary epics may narrate many facets of life and even define how a great number of humans throughout history have experienced the world, it is not possible to control existence through human conceptions of it. What is more, realizing this does not uncover a natural key according to which one may decode the unknowable. The crests and trenches of life follow a pattern that occurs with a "blind violence" (296) that cannot be controlled.

To a reader seeking a way to heal the wounds of history and contemporary globalization by taking a literary tour that encapsulates St. Lucian identity, *Omeros* demonstrates that understanding identity in the Caribbean postcolony is neither so straightforward as inserting its St. Lucian characters into a classic Western narrative nor so simple as returning to African origins. Rather than signifying a multicultural synthesis of these supposed opposites through a celebration of globalization and glorification of St.

Lucian characters, the text's complex web of imagery allows for a posthumanist understanding of a history of colonial violence, enslavement, and contemporary economic and cultural imperialism. The narrative questions essentialist identities by locating the self within a natural world that is continually changing. Its foregrounding of the ocean and attention to plants, insects, and birds along with many other animals and environmental elements is not merely pathetic fallacy or anthropomorphism. The usefulness of the text is not in understanding all of life through a metaphor of humanity or reading the world through a human experience of it. More than just metaphor, the text's nature-based descriptions unhinge representation from individual subjectivity and narrate lived reality through a posthumanist approach.

Rather than structuring the text according to the subject formation of its characters or by drawing a universal humanist connection between the suffering of disparate people, *Omeros*'s multiple storylines and settings are intertwined through the epic simile of the sea-swift. Moving with the ocean currents that flow through the middle passage, the sea-swift surfaces in various spaces in the African Diaspora. As Philoctete and Achille cut down the trees in the first few pages of the text, the sea-swift appears "far from its home, / confused by the waves of blue hills" as it "cross[es] the cloud-surf" that fills "the hole the laurel had left" (6) in the St. Lucian sky. Likewise, when Achille "question[s] his name and its origin" (130), it is "this mite of the sky-touching sea / towing a pirogue a thousand times her own weight / with a hummingbird's electric wings, this engine / that sho[ots] ahead of each question like an answer" (130) that transports him to the Africa of his father Afolabe. The sea-swift also emerges in the US, where the author-figure spies "slave shacks" (177); the "gibbet branches of a silk-cotton tree / from which Afolabes

hung like bats" (178); and "the Trail of Tears" (177). And, like Maud, whose hands "diving like a swift" (89) embroider the migrating birds of St. Lucia on a quilt, the author-figure traces the path of the sea-swift throughout the verse itself. Thus, toward the end of the text, the narrator reflects,

> I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text; / her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking / basins of a globe in which one half fits the next / into an equator, both shores neatly clicking / into a globe; except that its meridian / was not North and South but East and West. One, the New / World, made exactly like the Old, halves of one brain, / or the beat of both hands rowing that bear the two / vessels of the heart with balance, weight, and design. / Her wing-beat carries these islands to Africa, / she sewed the Atlantic rift with a needle's line, / the rift in the soul (319).

Swooping across epochs and moving within and between seemingly separate realities, the sea-swift sutures together the perceived opposites into which humans have bifurcated the world. The sea-swift reveals that "the New World, made exactly like the Old" (319), is not a replica or revision of an earlier model of existence. Rather, it is but one part of a body of physical matter that forms a globe whose orbit, like the inner workings of the "two / vessels of the heart" (319), has a "balance, weight, and design" (319) that enables life. As the sea-swift "sew[s] the Atlantic rift with a needle's line (319), it heals "the rift in the soul" (319) that has caused the author-figure an agony that he also "stitches into" (28) his characters.

As the author-figure follows the sea-swift in his narrative "craft" (291), he gradually recognizes the implications of portraying characters by way of their wounds. Partway through the text, he acknowledges he has been "searching for characters" through which his "sorrow [might] ha[ve] been replaced," because "[w]hen one grief afflicts us we choose a sharper grief / in hope that enormity will ease affliction" (181). Portraying characters as symbols of suffering serves only to distract him from his own

disillusionment. As the text proceeds the author-figure struggles to engage in writing that narrates the challenges that postcolonial subjects face, without exploiting others' poverty for the sake of his own art.

Gradually the author-figure learns what it means to heed the advice that his phantom father Warwick gives him about writing. Warwick recommends that the author-figure be mindful that his poetic voice emanates from his childhood island home and the laboring women he watched there from his grandmother's house. These women worked "like ants" (75) carrying hundredweight baskets of coal, "the same colour / as their skins and shadows" (74), onto ships for "one copper penny" (74) per load. Warwick counsels,

> Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet / and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time, / one bare foot after the next in ancestral rhyme[...] They walk, you write; / keep to that narrow causeway without looking down, / climbing in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat / of those used to climbing roads; your own work owes them / because the couplet of those multiplying feet / made your first rhymes. Look, they climb, and no one knows them; / they take their copper pittances, and your duty / from the time you watched them from your grandmother's house / as a child wounded by their power and beauty / is the chance you now have, to give those feet a voice' (75–6).

Instead of depicting these women as suffering victims, Warwick recommends recognizing their strength. The author-figure initially feels "wounded by their power and beauty" (76), and he internalizes their struggle as a burden. Warwick prompts him to take a second look in order to recognize the cure for his affliction. As a writer he is charged with "giv[ing] those feet a voice" (76). Within a rights framework, endowing them with "a voice" would bestow agency upon these "Helens from an earlier time" (73). A work of literary humanitarianism would join these women in a testimonial dialectic with a reader-witness in order to establish their personhood and appeal for rights. It would, in actuality, speak *for* these women. However, an alternate possibility for a posthumanist

understanding of voice emerges in this passage. Warwick emphasizes that "giv[ing] those feet a voice" (76) means appreciating that they have given the author-figure his voice. It is their rhythmic persistence and the movement of their laboring bodies that shapes the author-figure's poetic voice, and he must serve them by following the rhythm they have taught him. His task is to articulate their collective existence as dynamic parts of an intricate network of life. The poetic voice that takes shape in *Omeros* is not simply the expression of human suffering or individual artistry. It keeps time according to the multiplying feet of these women who labor like ants; it moves through space along the flight paths of a sea-swift; and it finds its rhythm in the ocean currents.

Rather than representing St. Lucians as tragic heroes (a trap the text nearly falls into), *Omeros* tells a story that decenters the human. By showing that poetry and, more broadly, language itself does not originate in human intellect or signify human mastery over all life forms, the text reframes the trauma of the middle passage, slavery, colonialism, and economic and cultural imperialism. Moreover, the text provides a different way of understanding memory, trauma, and identity in relation to these phenomena by recognizing that language does not derive from an autonomous human. For instance, Ma Kilman's communion with the ants imagines how language exceeds the human. The speaker illustrates this scene:

> Her hair sprung free as the moss. Ants scurried / through the wiry curls, barring, then passing each other / the same message with scribbling fingers and forehead touching forehead. Ma Kilman bent hers forward, / and as her lips moved with the ants, her mossed skull heard the ants talking the language of her great-grandmother, / the gossip of a distant market, and she understood, / the way we follow our thoughts without any language (243–4).

The language in which the ants communicate is thought to be dead and is certainly beyond Ma Kilman's memory. Yet, her encounter with the ants is not about the recovery

of a lost language; it is about changing her conception of language. The language Ma Kilman encounters in this scene does not operate according to conventional logic. She hears it not through her ears but rather through her "mossed skull" (243), and she comes to understand it "the way we follow our thoughts without any language" (244). She is able to comprehend this language by engaging her senses differently and tuning into the nonhuman world around her.

The text emphasizes the potential benefits of thinking of language in a posthumanist way by showing how Ma Kilman's communication with the ants leads her to the plant that she will grind into a poultice to mend Philoctete's wounded leg. There is an important distinction to be made about this posthumanist perspective though. Ma Kilman is able to treat the gash in Philoctete's shin not by reverting to an earlier more 'natural' state that is thought to be part of a lost past, but because in the ever-changing nature of life, a migrating sea-swift transported the seed of this plant to St. Lucia. Indeed, "A swift had carried the strong seed in its stomach / centuries ago from its antipodal shore[...] She aimed to carry the cure / that precedes every wound" (238–9). There is no resolution to be found in a static past that cannot be recuperated. The cure is in the constant transformations that occur as life goes on; it is in recognizing how all life moves through time, registers change, adapts, and carries on with processes of living.

More specifically, the text reveals the problems with thinking of identity in terms of a bifurcation between the Old World and New World that fixes each in time and space. When the characters in *Omeros* are understood within this framework, they are torn between these two worlds. Within this binary, their identities take shape out of a series of debilitating traumas that render them perpetual victims. Though the author-figure initially

fixates on the wounds that such a division causes and thus reinforces a problematic binary, he gradually realizes that "Like Philoctete's wound, this language carries its cure" (323). Late in the narrative he determines to alter his approach to identity, but the language of the text has allowed for a different understanding of identity from the start. As the author-figure admits, "affliction is one theme / of this work, this fiction, since every 'I' is a / fiction finally" (28) an astute reader may notice how every representation of human identity is a fiction. Each proclamation of the self as an "I" is part of a narrative – each "I" is the central figure in a story of itself. A static representation of this "I" can never entirely communicate identity since it is always in the process of changing. *Omeros* attempts to portray identity – the "I" and the fiction of every "I" – in a way that embraces this perpetual change. It defies the Western tradition according to which, as Achille Mbembe points out, "the human being can say 'I' only if capable of positing himself/herself as a conscious subject, essentially different from nature through thinking and doing" (*On the Postcolony* 190). Walcott's text shows that the human is inseparable from nature, which continually eclipses human "thinking and doing" (190). Rather than distinguishing the human from nature, *Omeros* focuses the story it has to tell about identity in St. Lucia through imagery of the Atlantic Ocean. As it tracks how people have been dispersed and brought together across this ocean, which precedes and outlasts them, the text shows how the divide between an Old World and New World is a human construct rather than an innate determinant of identity.

Of course, the binary construct of Old World and New World manifests in real ways. This bifurcation of the world has supported systems of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary imperialism. *Omeros* is concerned with how each of these hegemonic

systems affects the people of St. Lucia. However, rather than continuing to define them through a binary framework of Old World and New World that manifests in the unequal power dynamics between master and slave, colonizer and colonized, and oppressor and oppressed, the text reframes identity. Calling to mind the dead bodies from the slave trade that extend across the middle passage, the text imagines, "strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture / is branching from the white ribs of each ancestor" (296). The suggestion is that life persists by adapting, and the past that seems to have been lost plays a crucial part in shaping the future. Thus the verses continue, "where coral died / it feeds on its death, the bones branch into more coral, / and contradiction begins" (297). This contradiction defies binary logic. Moreover, as the metaphor mixes the imagery of human bones and coral, it challenges the hierarchy between the human and nonhuman. The text imagines a "patient, hybrid organism" (297) emerging from beneath "the mirror of history" (297), and suggests that it "will change us with the fluent sculpture of Time" (296). In *Omeros* identity transgresses the boundaries of a binary logic and is reconceptualized through the mixture of contradictory metaphors.

The characters that populate the narrative exhibit an openness to the sort of hybrid existence that defines St. Lucia in this epic. As the text recounts a typical ride in Hector's sixteen-seater passenger-van, it suggests that the future demands that people in St. Lucia embrace such hybridity. It describes:

> Passengers / crammed next to each other on its animal hide / were sliding into two worlds without switching gears. / One, atavistic, with its African emblem / that slid on the plastic seats, wrinkling in a roll / when the cloth bunched, and the other world that shot them to an Icarian future they could not control. / Many accepted their future. Most were prepared / for the Comet's horizontal launching / of its purring engine, part rocket, part leopard (117).

As these passengers "slide into two worlds without switching gears" (117) they break through the assumed boundaries between these worlds. They are transported across these barriers in a machine akin to a "rocket" that "purr[s]" like a "leopard" and is named "the Comet" for the celestial form of energy that seems to power it (117). This imagery invokes a cyborg-like, posthumanist idea of the kind of existence that *Omeros* suggests is taking shape in St. Lucia. But, this hybrid existence is not simply a result of new technologies that "launch" people into "their future" (117). Transgressing boundaries is a longstanding part of the culture in St. Lucia. Philoctete and Achille exemplify this when they dress up as women "every Boxing Day, and not because of Christmas, / but for something older; something that he [Achille] had seen / in Africa" (275). Achille wears Helen's signature yellow dress and with "a scarf round his head" (273), he is "not the usual kingfish-fighter / but a muscular woman" (273). This upending of gender categories signals the crossing of a boundary between African origins and Western conventions. As Achille whirls around in his skirts, he becomes "his own epitaph, / his own resurrection" (273), and in these festivities "people would laugh / at what they had lost" (273). Though the wounds of the middle passage, slavery, and colonialism are remembered on this day, the pain of these wounds does not define the St. Lucian identity that Achille and Philoctete honor.

Yet, even as *Omeros* celebrates the way that its St. Lucian characters traverse the divide between Old World and New, it also acknowledges the way this culture is commodified through contemporary economic and cultural imperialism. The poem self-consciously criticizes the poets that it depicts in one of the seven circles of hell for their "love of poverty" (294). It also laments that Achille's village has "become a souvenir / of

itself" (310). Admitting that the village's "life adjusted to the lenses / of cameras that, perniciously elegiac, / took shots of passing things" (311), the verse describes how "[t]he village imitated the hotel brochure / with photogenic poverty, with atmosphere" (311). However, as it notes the tourist attractions that "those who were 'people' lovers" (311) are sure to capture, it also remarks that, of these tourists, [n]one saw a swift dart / over the cactus on the cliff or heard it cry once" (312). This is particularly significant because it is this swift that carries the cure for Philoctete's wound (a cure he will not sell to the tourists), and it is by paying attention to this swift and following its path that the narrative is able to reframe the postcolonial condition. This epic will not allow the reader to engage the story it offers as "'people' lovers" (311) who are only interested in its characters as wounded victims. Rather than defining postcolonial identity in terms of the trauma that results from slavery, colonialism, and economic and cultural imperialism, *Omeros* introduces a posthumanist view that undermines the logic of such forms of domination.

Whereas literary humanitarianism allows readers to act as tourists within stories that ennoble the suffering Other, *A Small Place*, *No Telephone to Heaven*, and *Omeros* confront the difficulty of narrating histories of slavery, colonialism and contemporary structural inequalities without reducing people to symbols of oppression. I interpret their portrayals of postcoloniality as a challenge to the way that contemporary human rights discourse invokes a 'universal' human in its attempts to develop postcolonial subjects into 'proper' national citizens. In the final chapter I will consider the demands that human rights discourse puts on stateless persons – specifically the contemporary refugee. I will examine two novels that challenge cultural narratives about the refugee by destabilizing

the boundaries of victimhood and exposing the hypocrisy of a global hierarchy that extends from slavery and colonialism to contemporary imperialism.

CHAPTER FIVE

Refugee Stories: Contemporary Imperialism and the New Diaspora

I have already shown in the opening chapters that treating political violence as trauma reinforces an inequitable relationship between a narrator-testifier and reader-witness, dislocates suffering from its source, and forecloses narrative possibilities. Building on this critique, the previous chapter analyzed the possibilities for alternative representations of economic and cultural imperialism in the Caribbean where the post-independence state is often ruled by transnational capital. This concluding chapter elaborates on my discussion of the nation-state system, focusing in particular on the figure of the refugee. The refugee and the reader meet at the nexus of a complex interface between nation, state, and international collectivities. Presumably the refugee seeks safe harbor in a host nation because his or her rights have been violated by the state in his or her nation of origin. The standard refugee narrative thus portrays the refugee as a victim of a 'failed' state and invokes the authority of the international human rights regime in its attempts to justify the acceptance of the refugee into the host nation.

The figure of the refugee first gained widespread attention and became integral to discussions of human rights in the mid-twentieth century when Hannah Arendt noticed that displaced persons reveal a breakdown in the nation-state system, which does not protect the supposedly inherent rights of stateless human persons.[97] While the international human rights law instituted in the latter half of the twentieth century attempts to uphold the rights of all individuals, the refugee continues to expose the limits of both human rights and the nation-state system. Yet, in the late twentieth century and

into the twenty-first as the language of human rights began to be commonly deployed to represent political violence in the postcolony, the figure of the refugee has been resignified not as an indication of a systemic problem but as a symbol of the perceived failure of anti-colonial nationalism.[98]

Rather than addressing the root causes of political, economic, and social injustices in the postcolony, the language of human rights emerged as a way to discuss inequality without disrupting structures of global capitalism or interrupting narratives of US exceptionalism. In the aftermath of decolonization, in their attempts to compete in global markets, and under the added pressure of inequitable development policies, newly independent states increasingly sacrificed the well being of the nation in order to serve multinational capital.[99] While the citizens of more dominant states are sustained and even allowed to profit from the exploitation to which less powerful states subject their people, the resulting crises in the postcolony are repeatedly deemed exceptions within an otherwise functional nation-state system. As the subjects of the postcolony absorb the inequalities of the global market economy, the injustices of development are depoliticized and cast as human rights issues.[100] According to the accompanying cultural narrative the refugee is the ultimate victim of a human rights violation (and must properly perform this subjectivity), and the perpetrator of this violation is representative of the corruption of the rogue state.[101] In turn, the host country that receives the refugee becomes the savior by offering incorporation into a 'healthy' state.

This chapter reveals how Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* challenge conventional narratives about the refugee and facilitate complex dialogue about asylum.[102] Rather than rigidly defining people as

victims, perpetrators, or saviors, these novels destabilize the boundaries of victimhood and unhinge the representation of political violence from individual subjectivity. Both depict refugees who cannot be defined through the subjectivity of the victim, and they show that refugees from 'developing' nations are part of a new diaspora that cannot simply be collapsed into the nation-state system. As they demonstrate how characters slip between the categories of victim, persecutor, and savior, these novels deal with the prospect that it is not possible to truly know the person speaking a story or who it is that might be listening. Instead of forcing their characters into the juridical categories required of literary testimony, these texts explore the implications of no longer restricting the subjectivity of the storyteller or the reader within preconceived identities. As a result, both *By the Sea* and *The Dew Breaker* change the conversation about international political violence from a testimonial dialectic between the narrator and reader to a dynamic and open discussion that tests the possibilities of world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading" (David Damrosch 5).[103]

Gurnah's and Danticat's characters – from Zanzibar in *By the Sea* and Haiti in *The Dew Breaker* – are a part of a new diaspora that has different dimensions from the old diaspora because it occurs after decolonization and in the context of transnational capital.[104] In the old diaspora Europeans were transplanted and peoples from Africa, the Americas, and the Indian subcontinent were displaced in order to establish the authority of the nation-state and expand its influence through nation-based empires. The new diaspora moves in and across the space of the nation-state, but it disrupts conceptions of nation as it exceeds its boundaries. It is not made up of conquerors and dehumanized victims as in the slave trade and colonization. Those in the new diaspora are leaving

'developing' nations in an attempt to escape various economic, political, and social injustices, but such problems are not resolved in the supposedly properly functioning nation-states that receive them. While the international human rights infrastructure assumes that transferring rightless persons into the space of a 'functional' nation will endow them with rights, this does not actually address the fundamental inequalities of a nation-state system that is governed by transnational capital. The unresolved wrongs that occur in the 'developing' nation (as well as the hauntings of the old diaspora) do not disappear in the nation of 'refuge.'

Read together, *By the Sea* and the *Dew Breaker* reveal the transnational intersections of postcoloniality and human rights. As the stories in both texts crisscross different temporalities and exceed national borders, they show how human rights discourse is connected to historical and contemporary imperialism. *By the Sea* not only parodies current cultural narratives about the refugee, but it also demonstrates how such caricatures of refugees in England are extensions of the master narrative that supported European colonialism. After I track the connection between the old and new diaspora through my analysis of *By the Sea*, I turn to *The Dew Breaker* to show how attempts to simply reincorporate the new diaspora into the nation-state system not only allow fundamental injustices to persist but also perpetuate claims of US exceptionalism. *The Dew Breaker* contradicts the mythology of US exceptionalism according to which US benevolence and democracy triumph over foreign tyranny and traumatic political histories to restore human rights. Examining these two novels together foregrounds the systemic problems of a global hierarchy that is based in a history of colonialism and

diversified by inequitable postcolonial development under cover of the language of human rights.

By the Sea accounts for lives complicated by imperialism and postcoloniality by offering shifting truths, memory fragments, and conjecture from two different narrators who have each immigrated to England to escape their lives in the East African island of Zanzibar. Saleh, the text's first narrator, has arrived in England in the late 1990s as a sixty-five-year-old refugee. In Zanzibar he once owned a furniture store that catered to European transplants and travelers until an inter-family property feud led to his unlawful imprisonment. Roughly a quarter of the way through the novel the reader learns that in order to obtain a passport, Saleh has used the name and birth certificate of Rajab Shaaban Mahmud, the man whose family he dispossessed. The text alternates between narration by Saleh and Latif Mahmud, Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's youngest son who changed his name from Ismael and clandestinely immigrated to London via the German Democratic Republic as a young man.

Through the intertwining narratives, the reader learns that Saleh's father's second wife Bi Maryam was Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's aunt, and when she died she left her house to Saleh rather than Rajab Shaaban Mahmud, causing suspicion and resentment in her nephew's family. Additionally, in the early 1960s when Saleh gives a loan to a Persian trader from Bahrain named Hussein, he acquires the deed to Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's current home as security (Hussein has the deed because he previously gave a loan to Rajab Shaaban Mahmud). As it turns out, at the time of this agreement, Hussein has been attempting to seduce Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's oldest son, Hassan who is just fifteen. Hussein soon leaves town with Hassan, and becomes delinquent in repaying his

debt. Facing financial pressures because of the nationalization of the banks, Saleh collects on the security Rajab Shaaban Mahmud provided, and he ends up repossessing the home and its contents (thus taking a second home from Rajab Shaaban Mahmud and hastening the further disintegration of his family). In reaction, Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's wife Asha, who is also the mistress of a government Minister, conspires to have Saleh imprisoned. His eleven-year detainment ends under amnesty in 1979, but during this time his wife and daughter have died. Then, in the late 1990s Saleh feels threatened when Hassan returns seeking retribution for his family's losses. Wary of a corrupt legal system and exhausted by this feud, Saleh uses the now deceased Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's birth certificate, which had been amongst the possessions he repossessed three decades earlier, to obtain a passport and apply for asylum in England.

By revealing the complicated set of occurrences and long personal and political history that have led Saleh to seek asylum in England, the novel undermines the superficial categories into which standard refugee narratives flatten individuals. At the beginning of his account Saleh declares, "I am a refugee, an asylum-seeker. These are not simple words, even if habit of hearing them makes them so" (4). Such words have become commonplace as part of the increased circulation of human rights discourse. This text reveals the complexity behind the human rights language used to identify stateless persons. A former colonial subject, Saleh's identity as a refugee is deeply intertwined with colonial history, corrupt postcolonial governance, and continued economic and cultural imperialism. As Saleh tells his story, the novel shows that there is a significant difference between the narratives that are often imposed upon the refugee and the collection of divergent yet interconnected stories that define a life. The novel begins to

indicate this as Saleh – newly arrived at Gatwick airport – recalls looking upon the objects that he has removed from his luggage for inspection.[105] He muses, "It was not my life that lay spread there, just what I had selected as signals of a story I hoped to convey" (8). The novel exhibits the oversimplifications and indignities to which Saleh subjects himself in order to achieve a mobility that he hopes will free him from the anxiety and exhaustion of his life in the postcolony.

As the novel parodies the compulsory refugee narrative through which Saleh presents himself to the British authorities, it also provides an intricate set of narratives that acknowledge the ambiguities of personal lives and the political complexities of the postcolonial condition. He has brought with him very few items "from a life departed" and refers to this luggage as "the provisions of my after-life" (31). He has carefully curated these items to exhibit a refugee status that will gain him entry into an "after-life" (31). As I will discuss further in my reading of *The Dew Breaker*, the refugee experience is conceptualized in terms of a "life departed" in one's country of origin and an "after-life" (31) in a new host country. Ultimately though, the unresolved problems of the "life departed" persist in the "after-life" (31) – the seemingly simple words "refugee" and "asylum-seeker" only mask the systemic problems that stateless persons reveal. Thus, Saleh comments, "It is so different here that it seems as if one life has ended and I am now living another one. So perhaps I should say of myself that I once lived another life elsewhere, but now it is over. Yet I know that the earlier one teems and pulses in rude good health behind me and before me" (2). The unresolved issues of the earlier life unsettle the possibility for a new beginning; they rupture the linear progression that the typical refugee narrative promises.

By the Sea refuses a developmental plot and instead offers an unruly assembly of recollections that upend a simplistic understanding of asylum. As Saleh begins to tell his story he admits, "It is difficult to know with precision how things became as they have, to be able to say with some assurance that first it was this and it then led to that and the other, and now here we are. The moments slip through my fingers. Even as I recount them to myself, I can hear echoes of what I am suppressing, of something I've forgotten to remember" (2). Saleh is essentially announcing himself as an unreliable narrator, yet this admission is actually more honest than if he were to present the kind of testimonial narrative that would secure him asylum. In explaining why he is telling this story, he acknowledges, "I have an urge to give this account, to give an accounting of the minor dramas I have witnessed and played a part in, and whose endings and beginnings stretch away from me. I don't think it's a noble urge. What I mean is, I don't know a great truth which I ache to impart, nor have I lived an exemplary experience which will illuminate our conditions and our times" (2). Saleh is a reluctant narrator who undercuts assumptions about the nobility of storytelling and the supposedly universal qualities that it taps into. He will not offer a "great truth" (2) about 'universal' man or endeavor to unite his readers as witnesses to "an exemplary experience" (2) of the subaltern condition.

Instead of a testimonial narrative packaged for a select panel of witnesses, Saleh provides a complicated, unwieldy story to an undefined readership. He announces, "I will tell the story this way, for all the blemishes in the telling, because I no longer know who may be listening" (30). Rather than pretending that the text's readership is part of an international community of witnesses united by the ideals of universal humanism, the

novel acknowledges the anonymity of a global readership. While Saleh performs the role of the proper refugee to the authorities in Britain in order to enter the country, he will not grant his unknown listeners the authority of judging his subjectivity as a refugee. To this audience, he will tell a messier version of his refugee experience and the history behind it. As Saleh repeatedly acknowledges that he "no longer know[s] who may be listening" (16, 30), the text questions what it means to circulate a story addressed to an anonymous global reader. Rather than projecting a singular identity and authorizing function onto this readership, the text confronts the reader with a tangled saga of imperialism and inter-family drama in which people do not fit into the categories that human rights discourse prescribes.

By the Sea connects the rigid classification of people to colonialism and challenges the continuation of such taxonomies in the postcolony. The text acknowledges that colonialism depended on the adoption of a particular set of cultural narratives that naturalized a global hierarchy and the dominance of the colonizer over the colonized. Saleh recalls that under colonialism, "New maps were made, complete maps, so that every inch was accounted for, and everyone now knew who they were, or at least who they belonged to. Those maps, how they transformed everything" (15). Colonialism carved the globe into territories, cataloguing people as the possessions of one or another of the European empires. Under colonial rule people were assigned a value according to the identity that the colonizer projected onto them. Saleh remembers, "In their books I read unflattering accounts of my history[...] I read about the diseases that tormented us, about the future that lay before us, about the world we lived in and our place in it. It was as if they had remade us, and in ways that we no longer had any recourse but to accept, so

complete and well-fitting was the story they told about us" (18). The 'knowledge' that the British colonizer produces about the world and the place of its colonized subjects in it dictates their history and their future. It relegates entire peoples to a particular identity that seems "so complete and well-fitting" (18) within the master narrative that it becomes internalized.

Over time the master narrative has been challenged, yet it continues to evolve in ways that reinforce the supposed superiority of the West and justify the dominance of some over others. Commenting on the way cultural narratives have changed, Saleh recounts,

> But they left too many spaces unattended to, could not in the nature of things do anything about them, so in time gaping holes began to appear in their story. It began to fray and ravel under assault, and a grumbling retreat was unavoidable. Though that was not the end of stories. There was still Suez to come, and the inhumanities of the Congo and Uganda, and other bitter bloodlettings in small places. Then it would seem that the British had been doing us nothing but good compared to the brutalities we could visit on ourselves. Their good, though was steeped in irony. They told us about the nobility of resisting tyranny in the classroom and then applied a curfew after sunset, or sent pamphleteers for independence to prison for sedition. Never mind, they did drain the creeks, and improve the sewage system and bring vaccines and the radio (18–19).

Saleh explains colonialism, anti-colonial resistance, and postcolonial violence in terms of storytelling. Independence movements challenged the narratives that sustained colonialism, exposing their "gaping holes" until they "began to fray and ravel under assault" (18). Yet independence does not free the postcolony from stories that reinforce the supposed cultural, economic, and moral superiority of the West. The master narrative is revised so that it becomes a failure within the postcolony that causes "bitter bloodlettings in small places" (18), and colonialism is recast as having "do[ne] us nothing but good" (18) despite its hypocritical tyranny. This new set of stories implies that

colonialism improved life in its territories through the modernization (read Westernization) of agriculture, sanitation, medicine, and communications. It presents the "bloodlettings in small places" (18) as evidence of the supposedly inherent brutality of the African.

Accompanying this narrative about the failure of the postcolonial state, is the story of the new diaspora, which portrays the oppressed escaping inhuman conditions in the postcolony. According to this narrative, the refugee is rescued by the West through acceptance into a properly functioning nation-state. Saleh illustrates how this narrative operates in relation to Zanzibar as he discusses the British government's reason for granting asylum to refugees from Zanzibar. He explains,

> The British wanted to make the point to an international audience that it regarded our government as dangerous to its own citizens, something they and everyone else had known for a long time. But times had changed, and now every puffed-up member of *the international community* had to show that it was taking no more nonsense from the unruly and eternally bickering rabble that teem in those parched savannahs. Enough was enough. What did our government do that was worse than the evils it had done before? It rigged an election, falsifying figures in front of *international observers*, whereas before it had only gaoled, raped, killed or otherwise degraded its citizens. For this delinquent behaviour, the British government granted asylum to anyone who claimed their lives were in danger. It was a cheap way of showing stern disapproval (10).

Saleh illustrates the way in which human rights rhetoric is deployed to reinforce a global hierarchy that enables "every puffed-up member of the *international community*" (10) to retain a sense of superiority over the "eternally bickering rabble that teem in those parched savannahs" (10) of Africa. Zanzibar, his home country, is deemed a pariah within the international community for its apparent disregard for the democratic process. By accepting refugees at this particular moment, the British government makes a show of its respect for democracy and marks Zanzibar as a failed state. Rather than

acknowledging how the inequalities of a long-standing global hierarchy have contributed to the conflicts in Zanzibar, it is figured as a dysfunctional state and a threat to the authority of the democratic process that the international community supposedly upholds. The lives of those the government has "gaoled, raped, killed or otherwise degraded" (10) continue to be disregarded by a fickle audience of "*international observers*" whose focus on a rigged election allows them to celebrate the apparent superiority of their own states. Via Saleh the novel suggests that the British use the breakdown of the state in Zanzibar to emphasize their own civilized nature and reinforce their unquestioned authority at both the national and international levels.

The text continues its critique of international politics as Saleh becomes part of the refugee system and comes into contact with various (official and unofficial) representatives of the state who each project a refugee narrative onto him. His first encounter in England is with Kevin Edelman, the immigration officer who searches his luggage. Upon arrival, Saleh pretends that he does not speak English because he is under the impression that this is essential to his performance as a refugee. Reading Saleh's silence as a fundamental inability to comprehend the situation in which he is in, Edelman seizes an opportunity to pontificate about "this asylum business" (11). As he takes issue with Saleh's age and with the fact that he is not European, the text parodies the way in which the refugee is made to absorb the blame for the inequalities that he or she is attempting to escape. Edelman charges, "Why didn't you stay in your own country, where you could grow old in peace? This is a young man's game, this asylum business, because it is really just looking for jobs and prosperity in Europe and all that, isn't it? There is nothing moral in it, just greed. No fear of life and safety, just greed" (11).

Assuming that old age would grant peace, Edelman disregards any danger that Saleh may or not have faced in his own country. He depicts the pursuit of a better life as a mark of "greed" (11) and insinuates that there is a proper (more productive) age for asylum.

Meanwhile Saleh is of course merely playing the part of the helpless refugee, and the reader is privy to the internal dialogue through which he delivers incisive rebuttals to each of Edelman's absurd postulations. Thus as Saleh delivers his critique of Edelman, the text is really posing a series of questions to the reader. Saleh begins by asking, "At what age are you supposed not to be afraid for your life? Or not want to live without fear? How did he know that my life was in any less danger than those young men they let in? And why was it immoral to want to live better and in safety? Why was that greed or a game?" (11). His questions reveal the arbitrary restrictions that are put on the refugee, who is attempting to claim rights that have been conceived of in international human rights law as inherent. The host country determines whether or not a person qualifies for asylum, and Edelman demonstrates how bias and ulterior motives condition such decisions. Details such as age are a factor, because the expenses of old age cause an imbalance in the cost–benefit ratio according to which the refugee is valued. Saleh describes the logic of this measurement in several places throughout his narrative. He notices there is an assumption that a young man from one of those "other place where the oppressed manage to survive" (11) could possibly "work in a hospital" or "produce a future English cricketer" (49). But, someone like him is "too old for anything much except Social Security, assisted housing and subsidized cremation" (49). This, Saleh derides, outweighs the benefit of making the "superior moral gesture of allowing people from my country asylum" (49).

As Edelman continues to speak *at* Saleh, he moves from a disdain for his age to disapproval of his alleged imposition as a non-European. The immigration officer declares,

> My parents were refugees, from Romania[…] I know about the hardships of being alien and poor, because that is what they went through when they came here, and I know about the rewards. But my parents are European, they have a right, they're part of the family[...] People like you come pouring in here without any thought of the damage they cause. You don't belong here, you don't value any of the things we value, you haven't paid for them through generations (12).

The rights-bearing person that served as a model for the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was European as were the first wave of refugees after World War II. Since decolonization the identity of the refugee has changed to more often include individuals from 'developing' countries. Edelman objects to the new diaspora, alleging that they are not "part of the family" (12) and "don't value any of the things we value" (12). In Edelman's estimation the 'universal' values of the UDHR do not extend to people who are not of European descent. He justifies this by suggesting that Europeans have "paid for" these values "through generations" (12). Furthermore, he alleges that African refugees like Saleh are a detriment to European societies, as if the refugee infects an otherwise perfectly healthy state with social and economic ills that originate in his or her home country.

This suggestion that the crisis of the refugee is a product of an isolated state's failure to live up to European values ignores the injustices of slavery, colonialism, and inequitable postcolonial development policies. Speaking to the reader, Saleh counters Edelman's claims by objecting, "But the whole world had paid for Europe's values already, even if a lot of the time it just paid and paid and didn't get to enjoy them" (12). Saleh reminds that Europe has defined its values – its standards and ideals – by

subordinating others' beliefs and principles, and it has established its own value – its worth and its wealth – by exploiting resources and labor in the rest of the world. Further elaborating on the hypocrisy of Edelman's assertions Saleh scoffs, "Kevin Edelman, the bawab of Europe, and the gatekeeper to the orchards in the family courtyard, the same gate which had released the hordes that went out to consume the world and to which we have come sliming to beg admittance. Refugee. Asylum-seeker. Mercy" (31). In his judgment of the new diaspora, Edelman does not acknowledge its connections to the old diaspora – that of Europeans as well as displaced Africans and others throughout the world who were put into the service of Europeans. When Europe "released the hordes that went out to consume the world" (31), it did so at the expense of pre-colonial peoples, cultures, and societal structures. Now having finally gained independence from Europe, many new nations are still reeling from the effects of such ruptures and are further disadvantaged by inequitable development policies and the overpowering influence of transnational capital. Caught up in the corruption of a hierarchical nation-state system that is increasingly ruled by transnational capital, the people in 'developing' nations now seek "Mercy" from those who continue to benefit from their subordination (albeit now at the hands of their own governments). In turn, the powerful nations from whom they seek asylum too often react as Edelman does by recasting the refugee as the source of any domestic problems that the all-too 'benevolent' host country faces as a 'responsible' member of an international community blighted by states that threaten 'Western' values, such as democracy.

Edelman's speech represents but one story in an intricate set of cultural narratives circulating about refugees. In addition to critiquing the logic to which Edelman

subscribes, *By the Sea* parodies multiple other stories in this canon. After making it past the immigration officer, Saleh is moved to a detention center and assigned a caseworker named Rachel Howard. Rachel is able to get him released and moves him into a bed and breakfast operated by a woman named Celia whose guests are all refugees. Saleh describes one of them as "a picture of abjection and humbled dignity, a tragic body whose life depended on sustaining the enthusiasm of people who were debating its outcome" (51). Celia is one of these people who happen to have been born into British citizenship and therefore enjoy the privilege of debating the outcome of others' lives. Like Edelman, she talks *at* Saleh and the other refugees under her watch with little regard as to their points of view, and their silence seems to encourage her incessant chatter. Taking no notice to whom she is speaking, she comments to them, "Now foreigners are everywhere, with all these terrible things happening in their countries. It didn't used to be like this. I don't know the rights and wrongs of it, but we can't just turn them away, can we? We can't just say go back to your horrible country and get hurt, we're too busy with our own lives. If we can help them, I think we should. Be tolerant" (55). Similar to Edelman, Celia considers the source of the refugee's troubles to be solely the result of some other, inherently "horrible country" (55). She separates her own life from the lives of those whose subordination grants her relative privilege, but unlike Edelman she regards charity as the appropriate response. Though she is by her own admission uninformed about the political crises that cause people to seek asylum, she feels it is her duty to contribute to political debates on their behalf. She promotes tolerance, which in actuality upholds her own humanity and marks others' differences as signs of an inherent inferiority that requires protection.[106]

Saleh's caseworker Rachel projects yet another story onto him. After scooping him up as part of her case load, she gets him transferred from the detention center to the bed and breakfast that Celia operates and then finally to a small flat of his own. As Saleh remembers meeting Rachel at the detention center he notes, "I saw then that she had not really seen me, that the crafty look was turned inwards on the ways and means at her disposal" (46). At the start, Rachel views Saleh as a case to be solved and is preoccupied with ushering him through the system. This job offers her a sense of pride, and Saleh recognizes that in the beginning he is for her "the prized refugee" that she has "rescued from the jaws of the state" (63). Once he is at Celia's, he worries that Rachel may leave him stranded there. He thinks of her and one of her colleagues, sneering, "Those two young champions of justice and human rights had delivered me to a zoo and then gone to see their friends and colleagues to boast about how many ministers they had outwitted to get an old man out of the nasty detention centre and the fascist clutches of the state" (59). At first it seems that it does not matter to Rachel who Saleh really is aside from whatever details may help her to rescue him and prove herself a "champion of justice and human rights" (59). Through Saleh's cynical view of her, the novel critiques the way in which a bureaucratic system effaces individuals in its attempts to make a case for them as refugees. It suggests that this process sustains inequitable power relations by positioning those like Saleh as perpetual victims and others like Rachel as triumphant saviors.

Yet, as the novel further develops Rachel's character it becomes clear not only that she is more complex than Saleh first perceives but also that the refugee system is more futile than he understands. Saleh has not yet realized that Rachel cares a great deal about securing him asylum, not simply for her own sense of achievement but because she

actually cares about his well-being. When he exposes his secret knowledge of English with a fair amount of "glee" (64), he does not understand that her initial anger stems from a grave concern for him. He points out,

> She did not have to listen in silence while stories were told about her, only ring a couple of organizations to see if they had an interpreter for a client who spoke a language she could not name and was too ignorant of the cultural geography of the world to make a guess. It was not even ignorance, but an assurance that in the scheme of things it did not matter very much what language I spoke, since my needs and desires could be predicted, and sooner or later I would learn to make myself intelligible. Or sooner or later she would find an expert who would make me intelligible (66).

From Saleh's point of view, Rachel was after all merely inconvenienced by his silence while he was subjected to person after person casting him in one demeaning story after another. As the helpless refugee, his "needs and desires could be predicted" (66), because others simply dictated what they were, and he was not "intelligible" (66) due to his own apparent deficiency rather than a lack of understanding on the part of anyone else. Certainly these critiques are valid, and in fact Rachel has sought an "expert in [his] area" (66) to act as an interpreter – presumably to make some sense of him as if he is a relic to be explained. Over time though, Rachel does make a continued effort to get to know him as a person. Perhaps it does make her feel good about herself that she is able to overcome bureaucratic obstacles in order to locate resources and find a safe space for him to live, but she really is doing something worth feeling good about. She turns out to be his most practical ally, and she actually delivers what the refugee system promises. Yet, it is in offering the most perfect model of what asylum can provide, that Rachel reveals the limit point of the refugee system.

Granting the refugee asylum only offers temporary relief on a case-by-case basis; it does not resolve the systemic crises that prompt the new diaspora. Furthermore,

achieving asylum requires the refugee to fit him or herself into a master narrative that disconnects personal suffering from historical and contemporary imperialism. Saleh does not provide his history to the authorities because it does not fit the story required of the refugee, and telling them this story will not resolve his problems or provide him absolution. He allows others to fit him into the stories they want to tell of him so that he is able to escape a personal feud that has been exacerbated by discrimination from European banks and corruption within colonial and postcolonial governments.

While *By the Sea* parodies the refugee stories within which Saleh is cast, it also demonstrates that beneath all of the cultural narratives about the refugee, there are unique individuals whose lives are marked by convoluted dramas and connected to long political histories. In-between the chatter of those figures the text presents to satirize and critique the stories that circulate about the refugee, *By the Sea* reveals the complicated, sometimes distasteful, history that led Saleh to seek asylum. This history festers beneath many layers of narrative until it erupts when Saleh meets the man who Rachel calls an "expert in your area" (66). The scholar of literature that she has located at the University of London is Latif Mahmud, who is really Ismael, Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's younger son. It is ironic that Rachel means for Latif to be an interpreter so that she can access a story about Saleh as a victim and secure him asylum, because for years Latif has considered Saleh to be the man who destroyed his family. Saleh complicates the boundaries of victimhood, and Latif, as it turns out, is no expert in what happened to Saleh.

Saleh and Latif share an unfortunate past, but they have contradictory ideas about the events in it. Latif knows only bits and pieces about what happened between Saleh and his family, and he is troubled by "tyrant events" (86) from a past that he does not

understand. Any expertise he may have as an intellectual fails to produce a reliable explanation, and he is haunted by the gaps and inconsistencies in his own story. When Saleh seeks Latif out to be his "shriver" (145), he suggests that he is not necessarily the "assassin" (101) that Latif thinks he has been. What is more, the details that Latif shares in return cause Saleh to question the reliability of his own memory. The exchange between these characters allows for a dialogue that undermines assumptions about the refugee and reveals the complexities of the new diaspora. The resulting accumulation of memories and conjecture offer the reader an unwieldy account of a troubling family drama, political conspiracy, and desperate immigration. Within this framework, the one-dimensional categories of victim, persecutor, and savior become irrelevant. Furthermore, the reader is prompted to question how the language of human rights has been incorporated into a master narrative that scapegoats the new diaspora for the crises of a contemporary global hierarchy.

Like Gurnah's *By the Sea*, Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* also presents intersecting narrative voices that undermine both themselves and one another. To an even greater extent than Gurnah's novel, *The Dew Breaker* problematizes the human–inhuman binary between victim and perpetrator. Such a binary treats characters as foils by casting one as an inhuman architect of pure evil in order to celebrate the other as a fully developed human subject deserving of rights. Danticat's novel undermines this binary by requiring the reader to negotiate the perspectives of a myriad of characters affected by state-sponsored torture in Haiti. The text includes nine vignettes that portray various perspectives of political killings and torture under the Duvalier regimes in Haiti.[107] It tells loosely intertwined stories about people who have fled from Haiti to the US, but it does

not characterize these individuals as victims or suggest that the US offers them escape from the violence of their persecutors. On the contrary, the narratives that make up the novel depict capable individuals who have attempted to extricate themselves from dangerous conditions. In the US however, they find themselves continually bound to an unresolved political history and sometimes even interfacing with the very people from whom they were trying to separate themselves.

The novel opens with Ka Bienaimé, a first-generation Haitian American woman, discovering that her father – who she had always thought escaped to New York after being imprisoned in Haiti – was actually a prison guard and a member of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes. Members of this militia were referred to in Creole as dew breakers – a term that became synonymous with torturer – because they often disrupted the dew during early morning raids in which they either killed or captured their targets. Ka's father was such a figure before he immigrated to New York with her mother Anne. He remains unnamed throughout the text, but it gradually becomes clear that several of the characters in the various vignettes are either related to someone he killed or were themselves tortured by him or one of his fellow Macoutes. Together, the vignettes not only illustrate the heterogeneity of the Haitian immigrant community in the US and the porous borders of the nation, but they also undermine the legitimacy and political efficacy of categorizing people as either victims, perpetrators, or saviors.

By introducing the figure of the dew breaker from the perspective of his unsuspecting daughter Ka and then disclosing his past as she herself finds out about it, the novel challenges the reader's expectations for its characters. Before Ka finds out the truth about her father's past, she is in the process of selling the image that she has

carefully crafted of him in the form of a sculpture. In this "three-foot mahogany figure" her father is "naked, kneeling on a half-foot-square base, his back arched like the curve of a crescent moon, his downcast eyes fixed on his very long fingers and the large palms of his hands" (6). This is, Ka explains, "the way I had imagined him in prison" (6). Both as his daughter and as an artist, Ka is emotionally invested in this image of her father as a dignified victim. But as it turns out, there are cracks in this figure. Ka recalls, "I'd thought these cracks beautiful[...] as they seemed like the wood's own scars, like the one my father had on his face. But I was also a little worried about the cracks[...] Would the client be satisfied?" (7). Ka not only transforms her father as heroic victim into an aesthetic representation but also participates in the commodification of this persona. In her eagerness to create an object of beauty and then to sell it, Ka is concerned about the cracks in the sculpture to the extent that they might hinder the marketability of her artwork. She does not yet understand the connection between the cracks in the figure she has crafted and the scar on her father's face, which is actually from a wound inflicted by his last prisoner.

There is a clear parallel between Ka's artistic rendering of her father and the literary representation of such a figure. By staging Ka's realization about her father's past in the opening scenes of the text, Danticat immediately indicates that this novel will complicate the sort of one-dimensional representation that identifies individuals according to types (such as victim) and turns them into sellable objects. After Ka finds out her father was not a prisoner but a murderous prison guard, she re-evaluates the significance of the pose in which she has imagined him. She envisions him now as "a praying mantis, crouching motionless, seeming to pray, while actually waiting to strike"

(26). As it turns out, there are multiple ways to see the figure of Ka's father, and the text will not allow the reader to settle on one singular reading of his character. He is the question the novel continually poses and the enigma that propels the reader's curiosity. To a certain extent he motivates the reader to labor through the textual puzzle of the disjointed narratives and detect the many subtle connections that link this network of stories. Yet, the reader is ultimately prevented from reaching a definitive verdict about his character. The text never fully names him, and the reader's search for answers about the dew breaker is continually diverted by the questions that the various stories raise about him.

Ka's story of her father is one of loss and confusion; it is paradigm shifting for her and for the reader. When her father admits to her, "Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey" (20), all of the truths she relied on to make sense of her own and her parents' lives are suddenly distorted. Along with Ka, who as an artist recognizes, "I have lost my subject, the prisoner father I loved as well as pitied" (31), the reader also experiences the loss of a lovable and pitiable subject for whom the narrative expectation of testimony was building. Instead of foregrounding a story of the imprisoned victim, the reader is immediately faced with the confession of the perpetrator. Furthermore, this confession does not signal a cathartic exchange wherein the truth leads to atonement and healing. This is clear as Ka, laments, "I wish I could give my father whatever he'd been seeking in telling me his secret. But my father, if anyone could, must have already understood that confessions do not lighten living hearts" (33). The purpose of this novel is not to provide the testimonies of heroic victims or the confessions of inhuman perpetrators. In fact, the novel completely undermines such essentialist categorizations,

and rather than portraying the dew breaker as inherently evil, the novel confronts the reader with his shocking humanity. Through the sympathetic character of his daughter who dares to think, "maybe my father was wrong in his own representation of his former life[...] maybe his past offered more choices than being either hunter or prey" (24), the novel compels the reader to engage in a more complex reading of the dew breaker.

If the dew breaker is more than "either hunter or prey" (24), it is because Ka and her mother Anne have enabled him to mask "his former life" (24). The break between his life as a prison guard and his afterlife as Anne's husband and Ka's father occurs when he meets Anne outside of Casernes prison. He has just disobeyed orders by losing control over and shooting a prisoner – a preacher whom the Duvalier regime wanted to subdue but not turn into a martyr. Fearing his own arrest and possible execution, the dew breaker is relieved when the gatekeeper – nicknamed Legba after the gatekeeper between worldly and spirit realms – allows him out of the prison gates back into the world of the living. When he meets Anne he has just "managed to cross the threshold alive" (230), but he is bleeding from a gash the preacher dug into his cheek. Meanwhile Anne has been frantically running toward the prison "like a large, blind animal" (231) in an effort to find her stepbrother – the very preacher who the dew breaker just killed. Instead Anne collides into the dew breaker, and they immediately speak the same word to each other at the same time – "'Tanpri,' Please" (231). In this moment he "remember[s] how his mother used to say that when you spoke the exact same words as someone else at the exact same time, it meant that the two of you would die on the same day. He hoped that his plea merging with hers wouldn't lead to her dying sooner than she was supposed to" (231). In

a way their union does bring Anne abruptly to the end of her life, and it is on this day that they both experience a sort of death.

The rupture in both Anne's and the dew breaker's lives occurs when she asks this bloodied man "What did they do to *you*?" (237). In this instant the distinction between victim and persecutor is upended. The dew breaker recognizes, "This was the most forgiving question he'd ever been asked. It suddenly opened a door, produced a small path, which he could follow" (237). In response he declares, "I'm free[...] I finally escaped" (237). Through Anne he sees a way to escape his life as a dew breaker, and the very next day they flee to the US where they each attempt a rebirth. Ka later wonders, "At what point did she decide that she loved him? When did she know that she was supposed to have despised him?" (23). Though Anne and her husband do discuss the fact that he was a prison guard after Ka is born, it is likely that Anne knew from the very first day. Perhaps she attempts to redeem her husband because she herself has sought redemption most of her life. When she was a young girl her baby brother drowned under her care during one of her epileptic seizures, and now each time she has a seizure she thinks of herself as returning from the dead. She is also a devout Catholic, and she believes the union between her husband and herself is "a miracle, be it a sad one" (240). She even tells Ka "you and me, we save him" (25). Together, Anne and Ka are the dew breaker's "good angels, his masks against his own face" (34). As the child of this troubled pair, Ka has inherited a grave responsibility. In fact, her father chooses the name Ka for his daughter, because "[a] ka is a double of the body[...] the body's companion through life and after life. It guides the body through the kingdom of the dead" (17). Ka has allowed her father, and her mother as well, to live past death; she has given them an

afterlife. Thus, the dew breaker appears throughout the novel as a ghostlike specter who seems to have slipped into a new life.

The novel causes an ethical dilemma for the reader by exhibiting the dew breaker's humanity and vulnerability through Anne and Ka as well as illustrating his incredible brutality toward others in the vignettes throughout the novel. It unsettles the reader's expectations about the refugee system by revealing that Ka's father did not simply flee the tyranny of Jean-Claude Duvalier under fear for his life, but was also one of the Macoutes who tortured and killed his fellow Haitians under the regime. This man not only carried out the orders of the regime, he enjoyed the power he felt in terrorizing others. In fact, "He was the one who came up with the most physically and psychologically taxing trials for the prisoners on his block" (197). The reader is forced to acknowledge the dew breaker's satisfaction as the narrative details,

> He liked questioning the prisoners, teaching them to play zo and bezik, stapling clothespins to their ears as they lost and removing them as he let them win, convincing them that their false victories would save their lives. He liked to paddle them with braided cowhide, stand on their cracking backs and jump up and down like a drunk on a trampoline, pound a rock on the protruding bone behind their earlobes until they couldn't hear the orders he was shouting at them, tie blocks of concrete to the end of sisal ropes and balance them off their testicles if they were men or their breasts if they were women (198).

He revels in the power he experiences in manipulating the prisoners, and he engages in torture as a sport. The reader is left to reconcile his horrific actions as a prison guard in Haiti with his peaceful life of domesticity in the US. Ultimately, it becomes clear that while the dew breaker's life in the US masks the crimes he committed, it does not erase or resolve them. Though he moves to a new space and attempts to inhabit a new life, his crimes follow him. Not only is Ka's mother the stepsister of his last prisoner who left him forever marked by the scar on his face, but also many others in the immigrant

community, in which he lives and works as a barber, carry with them memories of the violence to which he and his fellow Macoutes subjected them.

The close proximity in New York between the dew breaker and those he terrorized is disconcerting, especially from the perspective of those who fled Haiti to distance themselves from the Macoutes. This is the case with Dany, one of the three men who live in the basement apartment below Ka's parents. Though Ka's father does not remember Dany, in Haiti he murdered Dany's parents. When Dany was a boy, the dew breaker set fire to Dany's home and shot his parents as they emerged from the flames. Dany escaped the fire, which also blinded his aunt Estina who raised him after his parents' death. When he was old enough he left Haiti at his aunt Estina's urging – "she'd insisted that he go so he would be as far away as possible from the people who'd murdered his parents" (115). Yet, in the US he ends up literally living under the man who murdered them. Like Dany, many of the text's characters experienced profound death in Haiti and came to the US in pursuit of a new life. However, they are unable to find refuge simply by seeking rights in a new space because this does not actually address the crimes that caused them to leave.

Even when Dany finds himself in a position in which he might punish the dew breaker, he is powerless to stand up to this man. Finding his landlord asleep one night, Dany imagines choking him or at least waking him up "to ask him 'Why?'" (107). However,

> Looking down at the barber's face, which had shrunk so much over the years, he lost the desire to kill. It wasn't that he was afraid, for he was momentarily feeling bold, fearless. It wasn't pity, either. He was too angry to feel pity. It was something else, something less measurable. It was the dread of being wrong, of harming the wrong man, of making the wrong woman a widow and the wrong

> child an orphan. It was the realization that he would never know why – why one single person had been given the power to destroy his entire life (107).

Dany feels the dread of being wrong about this man, for the person he sees is Anne's husband and Ka's father. Though Dany recognizes physical traces of the dew breaker who murdered his parents, he experiences doubt that the husband and father before him is a murderer. What is more, he realizes that killing the dew breaker or even waking him up to interrogate him will not provide him with a sufficient explanation as to how one person could exert such power over another. This scene illustrates the fact that justice is not delivered through revenge or through confession alone. Justice for Dany would mean attending to the systemic problems that enable one person to exert complete power over another person's entire life.

Many of the characters in *The Dew Breaker* fled Haiti because of fundamental inequalities that allowed some to dominate others. Yet, these inequalities persist, and the new lives the characters seek are impaired in the US by unresolved conflicts and new eruptions of violence. The text contains multiple references to racial profiling and police violence against the Haitian immigrant community in the US, indicating the occurrence of human rights abuses within the nation of 'refuge.' Eric, one of the other men living in the Bienaimé's basement apartment recalls how they used to go dancing at the Rendez Vouz until "a Haitian man named Abner Louima was arrested there then beaten and sodomized at a nearby police station" (38).[108] And, in the first days after Eric's wife finally arrives in New York from Haiti after being separated from her husband for seven years, she is petrified as she listens to a story on the radio about "a Haitian American man named Patrick Dorismond who'd been killed. He had been shot by a policeman in a place called Manhattan" (45).[109] Danticat's incorporation of these real crimes into the novel

draws on the public outrage surrounding these events and undermines the image of the US as a safe haven for Haitian refugees. Within Danticat's fictional narrative, Eric's newly arrived immigrant wife follows news reports about Dorismond, and chants along with the voices from her radio, "No justice, no peace" as she is "stewing chicken and frying fish" (47). Meanwhile, unbeknownst to her, the basement apartment in which she is cooking is rented from a former dew breaker who murdered the parents of one of the men with whom her husband has been living. Putting all of these details together, the reader is able to recognize the text's many-layered critique of the human rights regime and US exceptionalism.

The text shows that three decades after Ka's father and his fellow Macoutes terrorized the Haitian population, causing many to take flight, violence against the Haitian population continues. What is more, in the US the diasporic community continues to include both those who took part in various waves of violence and those who were subjected to it. For instance, at a Christmas Eve midnight mass with her parents, Ka believes she sees Emmanuel Constant, the Haitian leader of a death squad and former CIA operative, amongst the congregation.[110] For Anne, Constant is a reminder of her husband's offenses, and the flyers in their neighborhood that advertise Constant's crimes intensify her fear that her husband will be taken away from her. The text explains,

> They'd never spoken about the flyer, even when, bleached by the sun and wrinkled by the cold, it slowly began to fade. After a while, the letters and numbers started disappearing so that the word rape became ape and the 5 vanished from 5,000, leaving a trio of zeros as the number of Constant's casualties. The demonic-looking horns that passersby had added to Constant's head and the Creole curses they'd scribbled on the flyer were nearly gone too, turning it into a fragmented collage with as many additions as erasures (79).

Like Ka's father, Constant has been able to evade justice in Haiti by going to the US. The text also explains that Constant was "tried in absentia in a Haitian court and sentenced to life in prison, a sentence he would probably never serve" (79). Furthermore, a community group, not the US government, has posted the flyer. And, already, the image of Constant as a rapist and murderer has "slowly beg[un] to fade" (79). As a result the word "rape became ape" (79) – a seemingly comical difference that transforms a serious crime against individual women into a racist dehumanization of all Haitian men in the US. The "trio of zeros" (79) that stand in for Constant's casualties emphasize the erasure of each of these individuals in a death that has not only taken their lives but has also been allowed to annihilate evidence of their existence as their murders have gone unpunished. Even the horns and Creole curses are beginning to recede into the layers of signification, turning this palimpsest into a "fragmented collage with as many additions as erasures" (79). The flyer is like the fragmented text whose disjointed vignettes crisscross to form an unruly amalgamation of diverse, sometimes contradictory, reflections. This messy layering of narratives resists a consistent, uncomplicated viewpoint and requires a different way of reading.

The Dew Breaker's fragmented narrative style compels the reader to do the work of identifying connections, detecting gaps, and interpreting silences in order to see beyond the facades that mask systemic political problems. Moreover, the text deters the reader from relying on rigid juridical categories (victim, persecutor, and savior) to make sense of the deep-rooted political issues that it illustrates. The reader is continually made to inhabit the various positions of characters who undermine the easy categories the reader relies upon in order to cast judgment and exert moral authority. This is the case

with Claude, a Haitian teenager who has been "expatriated twice, from both his native country and his adopted land" (100). Having immigrated to New York with his parents as a child, Claude became addicted to drugs there, and at fourteen shot and killed his father when he took his drugs away. After being released from juvenile detention in New York and then from an overcrowded prison in Port-au-Prince, he came to Beau Jour where his mother's family took him in. Now he finds himself being rehabilitated within the familial structure from which he had been previously detached. He muses, "It's like a puzzle, a weird-ass kind of puzzle, man[...] I'm the puzzle and these people are putting me back together, telling me things about myself and my family that I never knew or gave a fuck about" (102). This diasporic figure, now twice-exiled, has returned to origins he did not even know about, and here, despite a grave crime, he has found peace.

Like Ka's father, Claude poses an ethical dilemma for the reader. Both are "like a puzzle" (102) – Claude to himself and the dew breaker to the reader. At the same time, the novel's depictions of these two characters undermine an uncomplicated reading of either one. Claude realizes, "I've done something really bad that makes me want to live my life like a fucking angel now" (119), and so he "speak[s] his nightmares to himself as well as others" (120). In contrast, the dew breaker relies on "his kas, his good angels" to be "his masks against his own face" (34). Furthermore, even when he explains to Ka that the "nightmares [he was] always having" were about what he "did to others" (23), he understands that "confessions do not lighten living hearts" (33). It is possible to put a person back together, but this does not necessarily make them whole or lessen their guilt. Furthermore there is a distinction made here between Claude's family "putting [him] back together" (102) and an anonymous global reader assembling the various narrative

details about the dew breaker into a consistent identity. The text ensures that the latter is simply not possible. For the reader, Ka's father remains like those statues that he brings Ka to museums to see as a child – he is forever missing parts, and the reader does not have the capacity to make him whole.

The Dew Breaker asks the reader to accept that it is not possible to rescue its characters by making them whole, and to consider that the purpose of literature perhaps lies elsewhere. Rather than try to fix the characters by fitting them into pre-given categories, the reader might instead set out to learn from their incomplete forms. Danticat's portrayal of these heterogeneous characters, both as individuals and as part of the new diaspora, does not allow the reader to take on moral superiority by judging the characters or acting as a witness within a purportedly cathartic literary exchange. Instead it compels the reader to detect the deep-rooted political inequalities of which the new diaspora is a symptom.

Together, *The Dew Breaker* and *By the Sea* expose the problems with narrating and reading the new diaspora through a human rights framework that masks historical and contemporary imperialism. *By the Sea* demonstrates how cultural narratives about the refugee deploy the language of human rights to cast the postcolonial state as persecutor, the refugee as victim, and the host country as savior. It exposes the stories that are projected onto the refugee as extensions of the master narrative that supported slavery and colonialism. Furthermore, it challenges the assumption that crises in the postcolony are exceptions in an otherwise functional nation-state system. While *By the Sea* challenges claims of European benevolence in the face of 'failed' postcolonial states, *The Dew Breaker* undermines assertions of US exceptionalism. The latter novel shows that

attempts to simply reincorporate the new diaspora into the nation-state system compound injustice and mask the systemic problems that continue to haunt the refugee. What is more, both novels not only present multiple narrative perspectives and possible truths, but they also destabilize the boundaries of victimhood, undermining any authority the reader might have assumed in redeeming a subaltern 'victim' through a humanitarian textual exchange between a narrator-testifier and reader-witness. In place of this testimonial structure, these novels offer many-layered stories that require readers to both sharpen their critical senses and confront undesirable and contradictory truths.

By the Sea and *The Dew Breaker* transform the conversation about injustice from a testimonial narrative that reinforces the rigid classification of individuals and states as either persecutors, victims, or saviors to an unguarded discussion that includes the unique points of view of multiple speakers and an unknown global reader. In this way they not only challenge the dominant discourse of human rights, but they also test contemporary literature's capacity to engage in political critique. Rather than extending the juridical into a literary space, these novels expose how storytelling defines the juridical. As they expose the structural inequalities that the language of human rights masks, they demonstrate how narrative analysis may serve a political function. Ultimately, *By the Sea* and *The Dew Breaker* prove that literature offers unique opportunities to analyze the narratives that structure concepts of justice.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how political violence in Africa, the Caribbean, and the India subcontinent is narrated and read in contemporary Anglophone literature. It has shown how the literary incarnation of narrator as testifier and reader as witness generates unequal subjects, and it has interrogated literary testimony for its attempts to unite these subjects in the image of a 'universal' human that undermines the humanity of the subaltern. As literary humanitarianism projects a 'universal' human subject that is in actuality a national citizen-subject, it exhibits the ethical turn that occurs in literature and politics when the nation-based system to guarantee rights reaches its limits. I have argued that the resulting proliferation of human rights discourse fetishizes suffering and dislocates it from histories of colonialism, inequitable development policies, and the growth of transnational capital.

Rather than approaching literature as a way to extend the juridical, I have demonstrated how literature may encourage critical analysis of the inequitable cultural narratives and limiting discursive frameworks that define the juridical. The political potential of literature in the postcolony is not in staging humanitarian resolutions but in interrogating the frameworks that sustain imperialism. I have engaged a posthumanist mode of reading in order to critique the way that the discourse of human rights reinforces a false universal that masks global inequalities and to ask how political violence and economic and cultural imperialism might otherwise be represented. I have found that transnational capital undermines the rights that universal humanism and national citizenship promise to deliver in the postcolony. Furthermore, it is not just post-

independence states that serve transnational capital; this is a systemic problem on a global scale. Human life is structured by inequitable socioeconomic and political realities. Literature is in a unique position to challenge the cultural narratives and discursive frameworks that sustain global inequalities. It may expose, interrogate, and rethink the logic that enables injustice, and it may imagine innovative ways of engaging in political activism by remaining open to unknown narrative possibilities.

Literature offers a space within which to examine the narratives that orient the human in the world, and it offers a way to intervene in those narratives by facilitating critical conversations. The relationship between narrator and reader sets the parameters for such conversations. When this dialectic is structured by a testimonial narrative and restricted within the discursive framework of human rights, it forecloses critical possibilities by fetishizing suffering and depoliticizing socioeconomic crises. Analyzing the narrative mechanics of literary humanitarianism reveals how human rights discourse operates not only in literature but also as part of a broader network of cultural narratives that sustain global inequalities. For instance, this project touches on the connection between literary humanitarianism and contemporary forms of journalism in its analysis of Philip Gourevitch's and Antjie Krog's texts. Contemporary representations of political violence increasingly share a common testimonial narrative structure across mediums ranging from literary fiction to international news reports. It is crucial to recognize how the increased circulation of human rights discourse in such forms of representation together shape the way the English speaking public understands political and economic crises.

This dissertation began with the words of a refugee whose story of survival as "a helpless human" (Eggers xiii) exemplifies the way that literary humanitarianism – and the human rights framework more broadly – reinforces a global hierarchy. Eggers' novel *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* relies on a humanitarian reader not only to witness the suffering of this "helpless human" (xiii) but also to accompany him on his harrowing journey and celebrate his ultimate triumph when help finally arrives. After analyzing the power dynamics of such a testifier–witness dialectic and examining alternative narrative strategies, this dissertation closes with a chapter that discusses the story of a refugee who acknowledges that he "no longer know[s] who is listening" (Gurnah 16, 30). In contrast to the literary humanitarian model, this method of telling a story without knowing who is listening allows for variable and innovative ways of reading. It also recognizes that literature itself circulates to unknown readers along channels carved out by transnational capital. Every reader that contemporary literary narratives reach is implicated in a global market that is currently redefining the national–international order. While literary humanitarianism seeks to unite this readership according to the false ideal of 'universal' humanism that renders some "helpless" (Eggers xiii), this dissertation has argued that literature may also facilitate critical analysis of structural inequalities and imagine new possibilities for the human.

NOTES

[1] The human rights regime relies on a distinction between human and inhuman that marks certain forms of violence as exceptions by constructing them as 'inhuman.'

[2] I borrow the phrase "literary humanitarianism" from Joseph Slaughter who uses it to describe Third World *Bildungsromane* that stage humanitarian interventions (314). I expand his definition beyond a discussion of the *Bildungsroman* and use this term to refer to literature that seeks to extend the scope of the juridical and the influence of human rights projects by way of a relationship between text and reader that treats literature as testimony.

[3] On trauma theory see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (57–8, 70–74, 114). For more on the relationship between trauma theory and literature see also Dominick LaCapra's *History, Theory, Trauma: Representing the Holocaust*; Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Laurie Vickroy's *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*; and Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction.*

[4] As Inderpal Grewal suggests, the problems faced by 'underdeveloped' nations that cannot be resolved through accumulation of capital are resignified as human rights issues rather than political or socioeconomic matters (132).

[5] Spivak calls attention to a particular "extra-state collective action" that emerged in the late twentieth-century, and she names "The World Trade Organization [as] its economic arm; the United Nations, the political, and the UDHR, the juridico-legal" (Butler and Spivak 83).

[6] For a review of the issues around which debates over human rights have been organized see Ian Balfour and Eduardo Cadava (280, 283, and 288–9).

[7] See Agamben (82, 84).

[8] For a historical discussion of the emergence of human rights as a new form of idealism that has emerged since the late 1970s, see Moyn (119, 173).

[9] For more on this transnational privileged class see Spivak's "Righting Wrongs" (171).

[10] Cary Wolfe makes a similarly useful distinction about posthumanist criticism. He writes, "the point is not to reject humanism *tout court* – indeed, there are many values and aspirations to admire in humanism – but rather to show how those aspirations are undercut by the philosophical and ethical frameworks used to conceptualize them" (xvi).

[11] Hannah Arendt recalls, "We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation" (294). I use Arendt's term "right to have rights" (294) to refer to the right bestowed upon the 'fully developed' human person recognized as a rights-bearing subject. In this way I acknowledge that one must occupy a particular subject position to appeal for rights.

[12] The humanist idea of the subject as agent overlooks Louis Althusser's argument that "the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection; i.e.

in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'" (182).

[13] For more on this line of criticism see Marais's "From the Standpoint" (229).

[14] See Marais's "From the Standpoint" (229) for a review of scholarship that argues Coetzee's fiction does address apartheid.

[15] A now classic work heralded as an exemplar of the life narrative genre is *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* co-authored by Rigoberta Menchu and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. More recently, Dave Egger's *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* continues the practice of presenting a life narrative as part of a humanitarian effort.

[16] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin discuss writing back as "the rereading and the rewriting of the European historical and fictional record" (196).

[17] For example, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969) are two foundational texts that establish the practice of writing back.

[18] See Salman Rushdie's "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance" and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back.*

[19] Badiou observes, the "return to the old doctrine of natural rights of man is obviously linked to the collapse of revolutionary Marxism, and of all the forms of progressive engagement that it inspired" (4). He charges, "Rather than seek out the terms of a new politics of collective liberation they [intellectuals and the public] have, in sum, adopted as their own the principle of the established 'Western' order" (5).

[20] While Arendt challenges natural rights by revealing the subject's "right to have rights" is tied to the state (297–8), Badiou exposes the subject with the "right to have rights" as a construct.

[21] Badiou points out, "Evil is always that which, in a particular situation, tends to weaken or destroy a subject[...] It is the subject who prescribes what Evil is, not a natural idea of Evil that defines what a 'moral' subject is" (Christoph Cox, Molly Whalen, and Alain Badiou).

[22] Coetzee's *Foe* changes the spelling of Crusoe to Cruso.

[23] Daniel Defoe was born Daniel Foe. The novel *Foe* uses his original name.

[24] Slaughter details the way *Robinson Crusoe* forms the "novelistic subtext of Article 29" of the UDHR and "underwrites the law" (54), which reads in its first part: "Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible" (*UDHR*).

[25] As Slaughter recalls, "In the UN committee's reading of Defoe's novel, books and other instruments of culture supplied Crusoe with an archival substitute for society, an alternative literary means for developing his human personality" (53). For a discussion of the UDHR drafters' debate about Crusoe's development see Slaughter (48).

[26] For further analysis of the conception of the human person in the UDHR see Slaughter (61–2).

[27] According to Arendt, "The paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general – without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself – *and* different in general, representing nothing but his

own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses its significance" (297–8).

[28] For his commentary on the UDHR drafters' inattention to Friday, see Slaughter (53).

[29] For his articulation of the connection between human rights law, the *bildungsroman*, and the development of the human personality, see Slaughter (4).

[30] Spivak recommends "seeking to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 295).

[31] Of course, those rendered subaltern by histories of colonialism and contemporary imperialism are not the only subjects without the right to have rights, and rights violations do not always bear a connection to colonialism or imperialism. This is, however, my focus.

[32] I borrow the phrase "literary humanitarianism" from Slaughter who uses it to describe Third World *Bildungsromane* that stage humanitarian interventions (314).

[33] Spivak's point here echoes Badiou's description of the split subject: "On the side of the victims, the haggard animal exposed on television screens. On the side of the benefactors, conscience and the imperative to intervene" (Badiou 12–13).

[34] Desmond Tutu describes *ubuntu* as "a central feature of the African *Weltsanschauung*[...] It speaks of the very essence of being human[...] It is to say, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.' We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a person through other persons.' [...] I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.' A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others[...] for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished" (31).

[35] Because the TRC offered amnesty to perpetrators who testified, it is criticized for failing to punish those who committed human rights violations. While the TRC's protection of rights is questionable, it is still the case that the language of human rights pervaded the TRC hearings.

[36] Choosing a traditionally Jewish name for *Disgrace*'s main character, Coetzee alludes to the lineage of human rights. Contemporary human rights law was adopted following the holocaust in a post-World War II environment in which displaced persons, many of whom were Jews, found themselves without "the right to have rights" (Arendt 294).

[37] Analyzing Susan and Lucy (as well as Melanie, the student who brings charges against David) also reveals Coetzee's unfavorable representation of women and feminist perspectives. Both *Foe* and *Disgrace* depict friction between women's rights and the rights of a racialized group. In a sense, this challenges the logic of rights by showing that it puts different groups in contention, but at times Coetzee's work inhibits women's empowerment. For more on Coetzee's representation of women and feminism see Spivak's *A Critique* (174–97); Pamela Cooper's "Metamorphosis and Sexuality;" and Lucy Valerie Graham's "Reading the Unspeakable."

[38] Critics generally acknowledge the likeness between *Disgrace*'s university hearings and the TRC hearings. See Sue Kossew (159) and Isidore Diala (57).

[39] The fact that Lucy only challenges her rapists in her confrontation with David locates sexual violation in a white man. It also depicts a white woman refusing to make a claim for her own violation by two black men. This speaks to the friction in the text between

the rights of gendered and raced groups and evidences Coetzee's unsettling depiction of feminist voices.

[40] See Coetzee's *Foe* (32, 55, 80–1) for instances in which Friday is compared to a dog.

[41] Likewise, the novel also never explicitly says David rapes Melanie, and it provides conflicting hints in either direction. David, who is not a reliable source, denies it in his description, "Not rape, not quite that" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 25) but admits that for Melanie it is clearly "undesired to the core" (25), and the presence of the Women Against Rape pamphlet (43) indicates other information may be circulating to which the reader is not privy. This ambiguous representation of rape is troubling because, to some extent, it discounts the very valuable and necessary attempts by feminists to identify and prosecute rape.

[42] In addition, Lucy insists on carrying her pregnancy to term and raising the child, but *Disgrace* abstains from framing her choice within a right to life argument. This can be read as resistance to human rights logic, which elicits a problematic mathematics of rights that debates a woman's right to choose against a fetus's right to life. Whereas, Susan attempts to speak for Friday as a "child unborn" (Coetzee, *Foe* 122) to establish his rights in *Foe*, *Disgrace* declines to speak for Lucy's unborn child by invoking a right to life argument.

[43] In 2003 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda convicted Pastor Ntakirutimana for his role in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

[44] Originally published in South Africa as *Country of My Skull*, the subtitle of Krog's text was added for the US publication, which also includes plot and informational changes. This chapter takes issue primarily with *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*, the edition printed internationally. I refer to this edition throughout as *Country* and, unless otherwise indicated, page numbers refer to this edition.

[45] According to the Bhopal Medical Appeal "Half a million people were exposed to the gas and 20,000 have died to date as a result of their exposure. More than 120,000 people still suffer from ailments caused by the accident and the subsequent pollution at the plant site" (Bhopal Medical Appeal Summary).

[46] The distinction I make between attending to historically situated circumstances and testifying about suffering as a function of trauma is indicative of a historical difference between a human rights tradition that emerged in the 1970s in order to create a record of political violence and the humanitarian movement that has grown since the 1990s. For more on this historical trajectory see Samuel Moyn's *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*.

[47] I use the terms "nation" and "nation-state" purposefully to refer to the "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson 6) with which the people of a state collectively identify. I distinguish between the "nation" as an idea and the "state" as a political entity.

[48] As Gourevitch notes, "ethnographers and historians have lately come to agree that Hutus and Tutsis cannot properly be called distinct ethnic groups" (48). Rather, as Gourevitch explains, "Hutu and Tutsi identities took definition only in relationship to state power" (50).

[49] This refers to The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which the United Nations General Assembly adopted on December 9, 1948.

[50] The region now called Rwanda was controlled by Germany from the last years of the nineteenth century until 1916 when Belgium occupied it during World War I. Then in 1946 Ruanda-Urundi became a UN trust administered by Belgium, whose policy it was to exert control through the Tutsi dynasty. The years Gourevitch mentions in this passage are important because in 1959 a Hutu revolution began in which Tutsis were killed and because of which many left Rwanda; in 1960 a provisionary government was established; in 1961 elections were held; in 1963 after Tutsi refugees from Burundi attempted an invasion there was mass violence against the Tutsi population within Rwanda; and in 1994 the genocide occurred.

[51] Further commenting on Odette's account, Gourevitch muses, "We are, each of us, functions of how we imagine ourselves and of how others imagine us, and, looking back, there are these discrete tracks of memory: the times when our lives are most sharply defined in relation to others' ideas of us, and the more private times when we are freer to imagine ourselves" (71).

[52] Both the South African edition and the US edition of *Country of My Skull* were originally written in English.

[53] For the sake of clarity within this chapter, I used "Krog" to refer to the author of *Country* and "Antjie" to refer to the character who narrates the text.

[54] Krog is the author's given name, under which she writes poetry in Afrikaans; Samuel is her married name, under which she reports for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC); and the text's glossary lists Antjie Somers as an "androgenous figure of Afrikaans folklore who catches naughty children" (Krog 389). For more about the various iterations of the narrator's names see Laura Moss (90–1).

[55] For more on Calata and Krog's controversial representation of her see Moss (94–7).

[56] It is such a toxic past that Animal literally contains within his body in *Animal's People*. In that novel, Elli, a humanitarian doctor from the US tries to assist him in having an operation that would straighten his spine and effectively remove visual evidence of this toxic contamination. I elaborate on this discussion of toxicity in relation to Animal later in this chapter.

[57] Harris notes, "It appears that Krog's poetic interpretation of the horrors that she has borne proxy-witness to becomes a way for her to validate her own voice and quilt it into the broader national narrative" (43) and she charges, "Krog, the ambiguously defined poet, is in danger of witnessing testimony in her role as poet-as-witness, but then reassigning the testifier's cosmologies to nothing other than her own personal truth" (46). Carli Coetzee also criticizes Krog's preoccupation with establishing her own voice, writing, "she seems to be concerned with the question of what kind of voice she is allowed to have, how many layers of skin and identity she will need to shed before she is audible" (694).

[58] Harris clarifies her argument, explaining, "I am not suggesting that poetic language and fiction should not, therefore, bear witness to historical trauma. Indeed, I am suggesting that it is precisely because the poetic register is able to render traumatic pasts in an emotionally affective manner and articulate that which is otherwise unutterable that makes the need for an accountability in poetry all the more pressing. Such a poetic accountability would acknowledge the historical and textual sources from which it departs, or that it transforms into a poetic register" (48).

[59] For example, Antjie speaks of betrayal when she discusses writing this narrative (50, 66); the text quotes Constable William Harrington who says he betrays himself and his people by telling the truth in his testimony (89); and it quotes a nomadic poet explaining the role of the poet amongst his people and the punishment for this poet's betrayal (292).
[60] Carli Coetzee notes that "the addressee of the text is not stable" (686), and she identifies "a crisis around who the addressee of a text produced by a white South African could be" (688).
[61] See Carli Coetzee (686, 688) and Laura Moss (92).
[62] Carli Coetzee notes, "This divided identity, this double signature, is more than a case of a married woman making a choice to publish under her maiden name (which is, of course, always still her father's name). The nature of the signature in this text points to a series of displacements and sometimes uncomfortable divisions: Krog uses the work written by Antjie Samuel, publishing it here under her own name, her other name, but in English, which is not the language associated with the signature 'Krog'" (686).
[63] Moss observes that the narrator exhibits "a desire for the text to be read as a micro-Truth Commission with many of the central parts played by Krog/Samuel/Antjie who slip uneasily between beneficiary, commentator, victim, perpetrator, witness, tribunal, and audience" (92).
[64] As Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi recalls, "As critics run up a list of Krog's failures, they repeatedly point to her use of victims' testimonies as building blocks for a postmodern collage in which she shuns factual analysis of the moment and afterlives of human rights violations for the sake of impressionistic vignettes that convey her pained reactions to narratives of physical and psychological violence" (109).
[65] For further analysis of www.khaufpur.com see Heather Snell, who suggests, "In using Khaupfur's website to humorously implicate himself in the series of exploitative acts Animal imagines to have occurred in the production of the book, Sinha at once highlights the need for authorial accountability and places in check the pleasure some readers might take in consuming, and subsequently exotifying, the tragic and ostensibly true account of a traumatized young man living in the socalled 'Third World'" (3).
[66] Snell notices how the novel, "draws attention precisely to the uneven relations of power that persist between postcolonial texts and their readers at a moment when culturally-diverse commodities circulate widely in global markets" (Snell 1). She elaborates, "Reproducing the global circuits of exchange in which it is caught up, *Animal's People* dramatizes the unevenness of power frequently embedded in relations between storytellers, story collectors such as the journalist, and their consumers" (5–6).
[67] The Kampani remains otherwise unnamed in the novel. But, just as Khaufpur is generally understood as a fictional Bhopal, the Kampani is representative of Union Carbide India, Ltd. (now Dow), the corporation responsible for the toxic contamination of Bhopal in December 1984. Union Carbide India, Ltd., which was bought by Dow in 2001, operated the pesticide plant where the chemical leak occurred. For over two decades no trial took place, and it was only in June 2010, that Union Carbide India, Ltd. was convicted of death by negligence along with seven of its former senior employees. These employees were sentenced to two years each in jail. Neither the company nor the Indian government has cleaned up the toxic chemicals at the plant.

[68] Meg Samuelson argues, "If the damage performed on bodies [rape and torture] remains unutterable in available discourse, it is spoken through the fragmented and damaged form of the novel itself, which, in turn, creates such allusive echoes and mimetically presents the disfigured bodies that cannot be represented" (846). Michael Marais reads the unutterable as a sign of the failure of the discourse of race ("Bastards and Bodies" 21, 28–30); Annie Gagiano suggests the novel's ambiguity reflects the inadequacy of "'new' South African national narratives" (817); and Derek Attridge reminds that "[t]he troubling of representational certainties in the novel[...] is a direct product of the ambiguities and conflicts of the historical time and place" (161).

[69] See, for example, Andrea Spain (174, 187); Samuelson (848); and Marais ("Bastards and Bodies" 30–1).

[70] For instance, while Shane Graham insists the "'talking cure' paradigm of the TRC is inadequate in itself to account for the complex dynamics that emerged from and shaped South Africa's revolutionary transition due to that paradigm's tendency toward a depoliticized individualist psychology" (127–8), he tries to rescue trauma as a way to discuss the novel by suggesting, "[t]hrough symbolic motifs such as the birth caul and the steatopygous rear end, then, Wicomb establishes links between David, Dulcie, and Sally (in the present) and Andrew and Rachel le Fleur and Sara Baartman (in the past). In doing so, she emphasizes the extent to which the historical traumas embodied in those figures from South Africa's past continue to echo in the late twentieth century, haunting the lives of the entire cape coloured population, and especially those who identify as Griqua" (134).

[71] The Griqua descended from the Khoi people – some of South Africa's earliest aboriginal inhabitants – and a mixed European ancestry. They are included among the ethnic group of mixed-race people referred to as coloured.

[72] Saartje Baartman, a Khoi woman who lived from 1789 to 1815 or 1816, was in her lifetime displayed in a cage in Europe as the "Hottentot Venus." After her death and up until the late twentieth century, her brain, genitals, and skeleton were exhibited at the Musée de l'Homme. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries activists and intellectuals called for Baartman's remains to be removed from the museum's storage space and relocated to Africa. For more on Baartman see Sander Gilman's "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality" and Zine Magubane's "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the the 'Hottentot Venus.'"

[73] At the TRC hearings, the stories of many of the victims' who died were told by their surviving female relatives. Antjie Krog describes those who deliver what she calls "the first narrative" of the TRC hearings – the testimony from victims and their families – recalling, "She is sitting behind a microphone, dressed in beret or *kopdoek* and her Sunday best. Everybody recognizes her. Truth has become Woman. Her voice, distorted behind her rough hand, has undermined Man as the source of truth. And yet. Nobody knows her" (74). Furthermore, Krog associates this first, generically feminine narrative of victims' suffering with "an indefinable wail" (75) from Nomande Calata (see my critique of Krog's depiction of the political activist, Calata, in chapter two).

[74] While historiography is the writing of history and the body of literature that this produces, historiographic metafiction revises an accepted history by fictionalizing it. For a detailed discussion of historiographic metafiction see Linda Hutcheon (114–22).
[75] Driver explains, "the Le Fleur that David is striving to recover is the figure uncorrupted by racism[...] David needs this recuperated, nonethinic Le Fleur as a model to live by" (225). Additionally, Marais notices "David's story *repeats* Le Fleur's story[...] both narratives are about their respective protagonists' desire to belong: in Le Fleur's case to return to the ancestral home of the Grigriquas and, in David's case, to trace his Griqua roots" ("Bastards and Bodies" 26). And, Fiona McCann observes, "In the case of David, the gradual discovery that le Fleur, who initially claimed unity of purpose between black and coloured in the fight against discrimination and land issues, became a 'sell-out', calling for a separatism that prefigures the discourse of apartheid, is a corollary to the situation in 1991 where the issues of the search for a specifically coloured identity once again comes to the fore" (McCann 34).
[76] Andrew Le Fleur (born Andries Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur in 1867) was a Griqua chief who attempted to establish a Griqua nation and land rights for the Griqua.
[77] For a reading of Baartman as an "ur-text" that functions as a "phantom" (Graham 130) and "the very embodiment of unrepresentable trauma" (131) within the narrative, see Graham's "'This text deletes itself': Traumatic Memory and Space-Time in Zoë Wicomb's David's Story" (Graham 130). For a critique of Wicomb's use of Baartman and the way this is used in the marketing of the book see Kai Easton's "Travelling through History, 'New' South African Icons: The Narratives of Saartje Baartman and Krotoä-Eva in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*."
[78] In South Africa coloured is a commonly accepted term that refers to mixed-race people.
[79] In his reading of Dulcie, Graham points out "Dulcie is a linguistic construct or lacuna only from the point of view of the narrator, who does not remember meeting Dulcie" (131). Whereas I see Dulcie as a messianic figure, he reads Dulcie in terms of trauma suggesting, "For David, on the contrary, it is Dulcie's very realness – the materiality of her body and the devastating violations perpetrated on it – that makes her story so essentially untellable. It is Dulcie's role as 'pure body' that makes her such a powerful illustration of the spatial-material dimensions of trauma" (132).
[80] Wicomb's own commentary about writing is in line with my suggestion that writing functions as a way to think things through in *David's Story*. In an interview that occurred before she wrote *David's Story*, Wicomb reflects, "that is what's exciting about writing: finding out, after you've written something, that a certain aspect actually is relevant. This makes writing not an entirely coherent process. I often find myself going off on a descriptive trail and later discover that in fact it links up, which is extraordinary. It is that process of writing which is exciting, but it's also what inhibits one because I think of it as an act of faith, that you have to just push through, and believe that what you're doing will work. And one doesn't of course always have that faith" (Craig MacKenzie 95).
[81] Spivak analyzes a-chrony in her reading of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. She writes, "Mustafa Sa'eed's story played out in an interim time with no staged listener. The reader has to deal with the fact that it is reported speech outside the encompassing frame of the novel that is silently resumed in the last section. It is an a-

chrony that keeps the event's status narratalogically undecidable" (*Death of A Discipline* 64). See Mieke Bal (66–8) for the definition of a-chrony that Spivak cites (64, n38).

[82] Multiple critics comment on the novel's use of "middle voice." See, for example, Graham (142) and Samuelson (840).

[83] David's opinion of intellectuals and their concern with language is further evidenced in a conversation the amanuensis describes between the two of them: "A fine word, he smirks, *li-be-ra-tion*, beating out the syllables with his fist on the table. And fine people just prefer to believe such nonsense as the *Cry Freedom* vision of schoolkids bursting into a spontaneous rebellion over the Afrikaans language. Get real, old girl, without a military movement orchestrating the whole thing there would not and could not have been a Soweto '76. Brilliant isn't it, how your arty lot just love these lies about irrepressible human nature and the spirit of freedom bubbling in the veins of the youth" (79–80).

[84] My reading of gender as a metaphor in *David's Story* takes a cue from Hélène Cixous who presents an opposition between male and female writing as a metaphor to discuss prevailing power structures and the possibility that some other way of thinking might emerge to interrupt the status quo. Cixous observes, "sexual opposition, which has always worked for man's profit to the point of reducing writing, too, to his laws, is only a historico-cultural limit. There is, there will be more and more rapidly pervasive now, a fiction that produces irreducible effects of femininity" (253). And she argues, "If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of" (257).

[85] Note that in the South African context images of black women and coloured women correspond to two different racial categories.

[86] For more on Arendt's "right to have rights" see Chapter One. For critique of representations of political violence as trauma see Chapter Two.

[87] This literary tradition spans from C.L.R. James and Claude McKay to Samuel Selvon, Jean Rhys, and George Lamming to Earl Lovelace, Kamau Brathwaite, and Erna Brodber.

[88] For more on the split subject of universal humanism see Chapter One and Alain Badiou (12–13).

[89] Transformations in the contemporary literary field are evidenced by a flood of scholarship that analyzes the relationship between literature and globalization. At the turn of the century the globalization of literature in English was a primary concern for literary scholars – *PMLA* and *South Atlantic Quarterly* published special issues on literature and globalization in winter and summer 2001, respectively.

[90] The tension between the rights of the tourist and "native" takes on further complexity in the context of the increased promotion of gay and lesbian travel packages in the Caribbean. Gay and lesbian friendly cruises and tours have become ways for Americans and Europeans to exercise the right to engage in same-sex relationships (which may or may not be openly permitted in the daily lives of many Americans and Europeans). Yet, such tourism also contributes to the exploitation of "natives" in the Caribbean, and it is

often framed in terms of a consumer's right to participate in the capitalist system. The conflict between the rights of "natives" and the rights of gay and lesbian tourists further reveals the limits of a rights-based framework.

[91] Kincaid's commentary on the army that shoots at its own national citizenry is particularly relevant to my reading of the army in *No Telephone to Heaven* later in this chapter.

[92] For more on the paradoxes of just being human see Hannah Arendt's discussion of the refugee (271, 284, 288–97) and Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the *homo sacer* (82–4).

[93] To a certain extent the group on the truck bears similarities to the maroon communities of runaway slaves, but such an identification also overlooks the distinctions between the subjugation of slavery and the postcolonial condition.

[94] Because *Omeros* is written in verse but does not include line numbers, I use a forward slash to indicate line breaks and provide page numbers in citations.

[95] As a mode of analysis posthumanism "forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of 'bringing forth the world'[...] But it also insists that we attend to the specificity of the human – its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing – by (paradoxically, for humanism) acknowledging that it is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is" (Cary Wolfe xxv). My posthumanist reading of *Omeros* explores how this particular mode of "recontextualizing" may challenge contemporary imperialism.

[96] It is uncertain if Walcott has purposefully inserted the Greek "Achilles" here in place of his St. Lucian character "Achille" or if this is a typographical error. Reading this as an evocation of the Greek tragic hero, it is possible to interpret this as a suggestion that the canoe both serves the St. Lucian fisherman Achille and in his dependency on it, signals his principle weakness. He, after all relies on a simple canoe and cannot easily compete with the "offshore trawlers" (290) to whom "traitors / in elected office" (289) have "rented the sea" (290).

[97] For her discussion of the refugee, see Arendt (271, 284, 288–97).

[98] For an analysis of the relationship between anti-colonialism, Marxism, and human rights see Moyn (106–7, 116, 119, 173). For additional commentary on the connection between human rights and the decline of radical Marxism see also Alain Badiou (4–5).

[99] For more on the "financialization of the globe" (364) and the strained relationship between the nation and the state see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason.*

[100] See Inderpal Grewal for more on the connection between the limitations of development and the expansion of the human rights regime (132).

[101] For more on the rogue state, see Jacques Derrida ("The Last" 325, 339).

[102] For a discussion of conventional refugee narratives, see Sissy Helff (333–5, 344). For analysis of the terms "refugee" and "asylum" in *By the Sea* see David Farrier (122, 126).

[103] According to Damrosch "world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is applicable to

individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike" (5). This chapter asks what this means in the context of postcoloniality and human rights.

[104] For more on the features of the old and new diasporas see Spivak ("Diasporas Old and New" 245).

[105] For a discussion of the various journeys that the objects in the text signify see Brenda Cooper (83–4, 94).

[106] Wendy Brown writes, "substituting a tolerant attitude or ethos for political redress of inequality or violent exclusions not only reifies politically produced differences but reduces political action and justice projects to sensitivity training[...] a justice project is replaced with a therapeutic or behavioral one" (*Regulating Aversion* 16).

[107] For an incisive critique of reviews and criticism that misread *The Dew Breaker* as a confessional account of trauma see Jo Collins's "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Representing Trauma: The Textual Politics of Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*."

[108] On August 9, 1997 Abner Louima was implicated as part of a confrontation between New York City police officers and patrons of Club-Rendez Vous nightclub. He was mistakenly identified by a police officer who said he punched him in the head during the struggle, and he was arrested for disorderly conduct, obstructing government administration, and resisting arrest. He was tortured and sexually assaulted in a bathroom at a New York City police precinct by Officer Justin Volpe. Volpe was sentenced to thirty years in prison. The convictions of several other officers involved in the attack and its cover up were overturned though one has served jail time for perjury during a related trial. See *New York Times*'s "Times Topics: Abner Louima" and Sewell Chan's "The Abner Louima Case, 10 Years Later."

[109] In the early morning of March 16, 2000 undercover New York City police officers approached Patrick Dorismond and a friend outside of a bar and asked where they could obtain Marijuana. Dorismond responded that he was not a drug dealer. There was a struggle and Anthony Vasquez, a plain clothed police officer, shot the unarmed Dorismond. Vasquez was not indicted and the shooting was ruled accidental. See Bill Vann's "The Killing of Patrick Dorismond" and William Glaberson's "City Settles Suit In Guard's Death By Police Bullet."

[110] Constant organized a death squad called Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH) in 1993 to violently challenge supporters of exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He was also a paid agent of the CIA from 1992 to 1994 and escaped to the US when Aristide returned to power in 1994. Rather than being deported to Haiti in 1995 to stand trial for his role in the Raboteau Massacre, he was allowed to remain in the US after he threatened to disclose information about his involvement with the CIA. In 2001 a Haitian court convicted him *in absentia* and sentenced him to life in prison. He has remained in the US, and in 2008 was convicted by a US court for mortgage fraud and sentenced to serve a twelve to thirty-seven year sentence in a US prison. See Larry Rohter's "A Haitian Set for Deportation Is Instead Set Free by the U.S.," Tim Weiner's "'93 Report By C.I.A. Tied Haiti Agent To Slaying," and Kirk Semple's "Ex-Militia Chief From Haiti Is Sentence to Up to 37 Years for Fraud."

WORKS CITED

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 (1995).

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972. 127–86.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Revised Edition. New York: Verso, 2006 (1983).

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Attridge, Derek. "Zoë Wicomb's Home Truths: Place, Genealogy, and Identity in *David's Story*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41.2 (2005): 156–65.

Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Trans. Peter Hallward. New York: Verso, 2001 (1993).

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Balfour, Ian and Eduardo Cadava. "The Claims of Human Rights: An Introduction." *South Atlantic Quarterly* Special Issue on Human Rights 103.2.3 (2004): 277–96.

Bhopal Medical Appeal. "What Happened in Bhopal?" Web. 9 Aug. 2010. http://bhopal.org/index.php?id=22.

Boehmer, Elleke. "Transfiguring: Colonial Body into Postcolonial Narrative." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 26.3 (1993): 268–77.

Brown, Wendy. "'The Most We Can Hope For…' Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.2.3 (2004): 451–63.

Butler, Judith and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*. New York: Seagull Books, 2007.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Césaire, Aimé. *Une Tempête, d'après "La tempête" de Shakespeare – Adaptation pour un théâtre nègre*. Paris: Seuil, 1969. *A Tempest, Based on Shakespeare's The Tempest – Adaptation for a Black Theatre*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Borchardt, 1985.

Chan, Sewall. "The Abner Louima Case, 10 Years Later." *New York Times* 9 Aug. 2007. Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/08/09/the-abner-louima-case-10-years-later/.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa" *New French Feminisms*. Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980. 245–64.

Cliff, Michelle. *No Telephone to Heaven*. New York: Plume, 1996 (1987).

Coetzee, Carli. "'They Never Wept, The Men of My Race': Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* and the White South African Signature." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17.4 (2001): 685–96.

Coetzee, J.M. *Foe*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

———. *Disgrace*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.

Collins, Jo. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Representing Trauma: The Textual Politics of Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.1 (2011): 5–17.

Cooper, Brenda. "Returning the Jinns to the Jar: Material Culture, Stories and Migration in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*." *Kunapipi* 30.1 (2008): 79–96.

Cox, Christoph, Molly Whalen, and Alain Badiou. "On Evil: An Interview with Alain Badiou." *Cabinet* 5 (2001–2): n. pag. Web. 15 Aug. 2011. http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/5/alainbadiou.php.

Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

De Kock, Leon. "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 23.3 (1992): 29–47.

Derrida, Jacques. "Archive Fever." A seminar by Jacques Derrida, University of Witwatersrand, August 1998. Transcribed by Verne Harris. *Refiguring the Archive*. Ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002. 38–80.

———. "The Last of the Rogue States: The 'Democracy to Come,' Opening in Two Turns." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.2.3 (2004): 323–41.

Diala, Isidore. "Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Andre Brink: Guilt, Expiation, and the Reconciliation Process in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (2001–2): 50–68.

Driver, Dorothy. Afterword. *David's Story*. By Zoë Wicomb. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2000.

Durrant, Samuel. "Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J.M. Coetzee's Inconsolable Works of Mourning." *Contemporary Literature* 40.3 (1999): 430–63.

Easton, Kai. "Travelling through History, 'New' South African Icons: The Narratives of Saartje Baartman and Krotoä-Eva in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*." *Kunapipi* 24.1.2 (2002): 237–50.

Eggers, Dave. *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*. New York: Vintage Books, 2007.

Farrier, David. "Terms of Hospitality: Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 43.121 (2008): 121–39.

Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Gagiano, Annie. "Adapting the National Imaginary: Shifting Identities in Three Post-1994 South African Novels." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30.4 (2004): 811–24.

Gilman, Sander. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality." *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 204–42.

Glaberson, William. "City Settles Suit In Guard's Death By Police Bullet." *New York Times* 13 Mar. 2003. Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/13/nyregion/city-settles-suit-in-guard-s-death-by-police-bullet.html.

Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. New York: Picador, 1998.

Graham, Lucy Valerie. "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29.2 (2003): 433–44.

Grewal, Inderpal. *Transnational America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Gunn, Giles. *PMLA. Special Topic: Globalizing Literary Studies*. 116.1 (2001): 16–128.

Harris, Ashleigh. "Accountability, Acknowledgement and the Ethics of 'Quilting' in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*." *Journal of Literary Studies* 22.1.2 (2006): 27–53.

Helff, Sissy. "Refugee Life Narratives: The Disturbing Potential of a Genre and the Case of Mende Nazer." *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*. Ed. Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff, and Daniela Merolla. New York: Rodopi, 2009. 331–46.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2003.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988.

Kossew, Sue. "The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Research in African Literatures* 34.2 (2003): 155–62.

Krog, Antjie. *Country of My Skull*. Johannesburg: Random House South Africa, 1998.

———. *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999.

LaCapra, Dominick. *History, Theory, Trauma: Representing the Holocaust*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.

———. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Macaskill, Brian and Jeanne Colleran. "Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *Contemporary Literature* 33.3 (1992): 432–57.

MacKenzie, Craig, Transcriber. "Zoë Wicomb." *Between the Lines II: Interviews with Nadine Gordimer, Menán du Plessis, Zoë Wicomb, Lauretta Ngcobo*. Ed. Eva Hunter and Craig MacKenzie. Grahamstown, South Africa: The National English Literary Museum, 1993.

Magubane, Zine. "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the the 'Hottentot Venus.'" *Gender and Society* 15 (2001): 816–34.

Marais, Michael. "Bastards and Bodies in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 40.3 (2005): 21–36.

———. "J.M. Coetzee's 'Disgrace' and the Task of the Imagination." *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.2 (2006): 75–93.

———. "From the Standpoint of Redemption: Aesthetic Autonomy and Social Engagement in J.M. Coetzee's Fiction of the Late Apartheid Period." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 38.2 (2008): 229–48.

Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.

———. "The Power of the Archive and its Limits." *Refiguring the Archive*. Ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002. 19–26.

McCann, Fiona. "Revisiting the Past: Memory and Identity in Elleke Boehmer's *Bloodlines* and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and *Playing in the Light*." *Trauma, Resistance, Reconstruction in Post-1994 South African Writing*. Ed. Jaspal K. Singh and Rajendra Chetty. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.

Menchu, Rigoberta and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala.* Trans. Ann Wright. New York: Verso, 1983.

Moss, Laura. "'Nice Audible Crying': Editions, Testimonies, and *Country of My Skull*." *Research in African Literatures* 37.4 (2006). 85–104.

Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

New York Times. "Times Topics: Abner Louima." Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/abner_louima/index.html.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Anil's Ghost*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

Prose, Francine. "The Lost Boy." *New York Times* 24 Dec. 2006. Web. 2 Oct. 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/books/review/Prose.t.html.

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. New York: Norton, 1982 (1966).

Rohter, Larry. "A Haitian Set for Deportation is Instead Set Free by the U.S." *New York Times* 22 June 1996. Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/1996/06/22/world/a-haitian-set-for-deportation-is-instead-set-free-by-the-us.html.

Rushdie, Salman. "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance." *London Times* 3 July 1982: 8.

Samuelson, Meg. "The Disfigured Body of the Female Guerrilla: (De)Militarization, Sexual Violence, and Redomestication in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32.4 (2007): 833–56.

Sanders, Mark. "Truth, Telling, Questioning: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, and Literature after Apartheid." *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.1 (2000): 13–41.

Schaffer, Kay and Sidonie Smith, eds. *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Semple, Kirk. "Ex-Militia Chief From Haiti Is Sentenced to Up to 37 Years for Fraud." Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti 29 Oct. 2008. Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://ijdh.org/articles/article_recent_news_10-30b-08.php.

Simon, Bart. "Introduction: Toward a Critique of Posthuman Futures." *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003): 1–9.

Sinha, Indra. *Animal's People*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Slaughter, Joseph R. *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

Snell, Heather. "Assessing the Limitations of Laughter in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*." *Postcolonial Text* 4.4 (2008): 1–15.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

———. "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World." *Textual Practice* 10.2 (1996): 245–69.

———. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

———. "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview." *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. Ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi. New York: Verso, 2000. 324–40.

———. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

———. "Righting Wrongs." *Human Rights, Human Wrongs: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2001*. Ed. Nicholas Owen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Szeman, Imre and Susie O'Brien. *South Atlantic Quarterly. Issue Topic: Anglophone Literatures and Global Cultures*. 100.3 (2001).

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations. 1948. Web. 25 Oct. 2010. http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/.

Vann, Bill. "The Killing of Patrick Dorismond: New York Police Violence escalates in Wake of Diallo Verdict." *World Socialist Web Site* 22 Mar. 2000. Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/mar2000/nyc-m22.shtml.

Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002.

Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990.

Weiner, Tim. "'93 Report By C.I.A. Tied Haiti Agent To Slaying." *New York Times* 13 Oct. 1996. Web. 2 Mar. 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/13/world/93-report-by-cia-tied-haiti-agent-to-slaying.html.

Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

Wicomb, Zoë. *David's Story*. New York: The Feminist Press, 2001 (2000).

Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.